

THE IDENTITY AND FUNCTION OF *ETHNOS* IN MATTHEW 21:43

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Chapter 1

Matthew 21:43 in Recent Interpretation and the Approach of This Study

³³ Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? ⁴³ **Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruit of the kingdom.** ⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls. ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.¹

This study examines what Matt 21:43 would have meant as spoken by the historical Jesus, and how this verse contributes to the Gospel of Matthew's presentation of Jesus and his community of followers (Matthew's "ecclesiology"). I limit the analysis of the contribution of v. 43 to Matthew's gospel because it is uniquely Matthean, and to limit the data to a manageable set in this study. I examine this verse primarily in light of Matthew's version of the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33–46), though also in light of its parallels in Mark and Luke. In the process of examining the meaning of 21:43 as words of Jesus, this study inevitably also considers the meaning of 21:43 in light of

¹ Matt 21:33–43. Quotation taken from the NRSV, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989.

related themes in Matthew's gospel, but strives to remain focused primarily on 21:33–46. I aim in this study to examine the meaning of Jesus' words, particularly the identity and function of ἔθνος in 21:43, and their relationship to other themes in Matthew's gospel which relate to the identity and function of the community of Jesus' followers.

My approach is to analyze Jesus' words in Matt 21:43 as historically addressed to those who confronted Jesus after his actions in the temple, rather than to a general audience or otherwise apart from this historical circumstance (e.g., as Matthew's insertion). By consistently approaching the meaning of ἔθνος in this way, one rightly interprets the saying in its particular historical and literary contexts, and gains valuable information concerning the meaning of ἔθνος not otherwise discerned as clearly. If one does not appreciate this historical situation, but instead construes this verse as contrasting a general set of people who reject Jesus (and/or Matthew's community) with a general set of people who do not, one flattens and obscures the precise meaning of Jesus' statement in 21:43. Thus, throughout this study I argue that the interpretation of this saying must account for the particular historical situation in which Jesus uttered it.

In order for my argument to be successful, I must demonstrate that the text warrants this approach, and that the historical situation and the words of 21:43 are authentic to Jesus and not merely a Matthean fiction (the subject of chapter 2). I also must show through my exegesis that this approach yields fruit of insight into the meaning of ἔθνος in 21:43, and is not merely a fastidious squabble over slight and inconsequential nuances (the subject of chapter 3). The exegetical thesis of this study is that ἔθνος refers to Jesus' followers, who function as religious leaders in God's kingdom among God's

people constituted anew by those who follow Jesus, replacing the errant religious leadership whom Jesus directly addressed.

Several aspects of this passage draw my interest. The study of this saying involves not only the historical circumstances of Jesus' words, but also their literary relationship with the parable of the wicked tenants. The precise meaning of this verse is also highly contested, not only with respect to its historical meaning, but also its contemporary meaning and function in Christian thought. Some readers claim that Christians should renounce this text, because it fosters anti-Judaism. Graham Stanton describes the passage as "acutely embarrassing to most modern readers."² According to John S. Kloppenborg, who comments on the common, allegorical identification of the wicked tenants with the Jewish people, "Once the fictional elements in the parable became the Jews, the killing of real Jews became less unimaginable."³ Given my interests not only in the meaning of Matt 21:43 but its function as part of Christian scripture, I also desire to know what role this text should play, based on its original meaning, in 21st century Christian appropriation of this key verse.

In this first chapter, I further explain the approach of this study in two stages. First (section 1.1), in order to situate the subsequent presentation, I begin by surveying recent interpretations of 21:43. Second (section 1.2), I discuss the key interpretive assumptions that underlie the entire study, including hermeneutical presuppositions and basic characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew. Third (section 1.3), I present an outline for the rest of the study in chapters 2 and 3.

² Stanton 1992, 146.

³ Kloppenborg 2006, 31.

1.1 A Brief Survey of Interpretation of Matthew 21:43

Any review of the history of interpretation of a given biblical passage is necessarily selective. I have chosen to focus this review on the interpretations of “you” (ἀρθθήσεται ἀφ’ ὑμῶν), “people” (δοθήσεται ἔθνει), and the nature of the kingdom of God and its transfer in Matthew 21:43. This review heavily centers on published interpretations within the field of biblical studies offered in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, but also includes a sampling of Christian interpreters throughout history.

First of all, I survey the interpretations of the “kingdom of God” in 21:43 and its transfer. The transfer of the kingdom centers on Jesus as a hinge: rejection of God’s work in Jesus leads to the transfer of the salvation-historical blessings to a people who bear the fruit of the kingdom as now defined by Jesus. In order to better understand this transfer, it is important to understand various positions on what is transferred, i.e., to what does the “kingdom of God,” taken away and given to others, refer? There are two options, though variously expressed. First, some define the kingdom of God in 21:43 as inclusion in the kingdom, and thus among God’s people newly defined by the work of Jesus. Within this broad interpretation, some define the kingdom as “the election of God and its privileges,”⁴ throughout salvation history. Others prefer a particularly future sense, referring to the claim to future redemption, vindication, and preservation in judgment as

⁴ Quoted from Snodgrass 1983, 90, 75–76; cf. also Hagner 1995, 623; Sabourin 1982, 772; Ladd 1993, 112; Hare 1993, 249; Hendriksen 1973, 786; Bruner 2004, 382; Meier 1979, 150–151; Schnackenburg 2002, 212.

God's people.⁵ Both, however, interpret the kingdom of God in v. 43 with reference to inclusion in the kingdom, and thus among God's people.

A second interpretation thinks that the kingdom of God here refers to present and future leadership among God's people, thus implying inclusion in God's people but primarily referring to leadership in the kingdom.⁶ The transfer of the kingdom of God in this interpretation thus implies that the new people who receive the kingdom act "as agents of God's empire in seeking fruit from the vineyard for God" in contrast to the failure of the previous "agents," the chief priests, elders of the people, and Pharisees whom Jesus addresses.⁷ Another interpreter offers a summary of this view that illustrates the variety of interrelated issues beyond the meaning of the kingdom of God strictly considered: according to David Turner, the transfer of the kingdom is "an intramural transfer of leadership from the fruitless Jerusalem religious establishment to the fruitful Matthean Christian Jewish community, led by the apostles of Jesus."⁸ Some interpreters restrict the kingdom of God to the leadership to such an extent that the salvation-historical dimension of the transfer nearly disappears; the transfer merely represents a change in leadership.⁹

The precise timing (and thus the means) of the transfer is also disputed. If Jesus' claim about the future transfer and the parable preceding it are a creation of the early church which Matthew adapts after A.D. 70, then some interpreters identify the transfer as having already occurred, in Matthew's understanding, at the destruction of the

⁵ Grundmann 1968, 463–464; Luz 2005, 3:42; Schmid 1956, 306; Sabourin 1982, 772; Boring 1995, 415; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:187

⁶ Keener 1999, 515; Turner 2008, 516–517; Talbert 2010, 252; Saldarini 1994, 62; Carter 2000, 429; Levine 1988, 210–211.

⁷ Carter 2000, 430.

⁸ Turner 2008, 519.

⁹ E.g., Levine 1998, 210; Overman 1996, 303.

Jerusalem temple.¹⁰ On the other hand, if the parable and the future claim about the transfer in 21:43 originate in the tradition of Jesus, then the transfer could be seen as an indefinite warning of future judgment. The further question arises concerning how Matthew and his earliest readers viewed this transfer, both the timing and means of its occurrence.¹¹

Considering the transfer of the kingdom also involves the question of the identity of those to whom the kingdom will be given, and from whom it will be taken away. Thus, regarding the interpretations of “you” and “people” in v. 43, perhaps the best starting point is the very common interpretation of this verse as a proclamation that Israel as a whole (“you”, v. 43) no longer functions as God’s people, and the community of Jesus’ followers (“people”, v. 43) takes up this role.¹² Many interpreters interact with this position to define their own. This general interpretation represents the views of Christian interpreters throughout history (though not always discerned through direct comment on Matt 21:43), for example: Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Bede, Theophylactus, Euthymius Zigabenus, Grotius, Zwingli, Calvin, and Maldonat.¹³ For example, Cyril of Alexandria interpreted 21:43 and the parable of the wicked tenants as representative of Israel’s history as a whole, with the rejection of Jesus as its climax: “But

¹⁰ E.g., Carter 2000, 429, Luz 2005, 3:41; for brief discussion see Snodgrass 1983, 88–89.

¹¹ Snodgrass 1983, 89–90.

¹² Earlier interpreters: Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.36.1–2 (ed. Rousseau et al. 1965); Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.23; *Comm. Jo.* 10.16 (ed. Menzies 1897); Eusebius, *Dem. Ev.* 9.11; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.* 68.1–2 (ed. Schaff 1888); Jerome, *Comm. Matt.* on 8:12; 21:43 (Scheck 2008); Bede, *Commentariorum in Matthaeum libri IV*, PL 92.94–95; Maldonat, *Commentarii in quatuor Evangelistas* 21:43 (ed. Raich 1874, 439–440); Theophylactus, *PG* 123.568; Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 21–22 (ed. Torrance and Torrance 1972). More recent interpreters: Bruner 2004, 381; McNeile 1915, 311–312; Trilling 1964, 55–65, 162, 219; Kingsbury 1975, 156; Strecker 1971, 33, 110–111; Green 1975, 180; Gnllka 1988, 2:230; Boring 1995, 413–415; Grundmann 1968, 463; Hagner 1995, 623–24; Hare 1993, 248–250; Hendriksen 1973, 786; Ladd 1993, 112; Steck 1967, 299; Osborne 2010, 790–791; Sabourin 1982, 772; Stanton 1992, 154; France 2007, 310; Frankemölle 1974, 247–256; Morris 1992, 544; Jeremias 1963, 70, 77; Stern 1991, 191; Senior 1998, 243; Beare 1981, 430–431.

¹³ Cf. Luz 2005, 3:38–39; Kloppenborg 2006, 22–28; Simonetti 2002, 139–142; see additional primary sources which specifically discuss Matt 21:43 in the surrounding footnotes within this section.

when they offended against Christ, they lost even the shade that had been retained; they no longer retained the sacrifices ordained by the Law, nor were they distinguished by the privileges of the Law;...they are dishonoured and without fruit.”¹⁴ The ethnic constitution of the community which replaces Israel is understood to be primarily Gentile by many (noting the use of ἔθνος),¹⁵ and also neither strictly Jewish nor Gentile but a group that transcends both categories, by others.¹⁶ David Turner in a recent essay documents that this perspective has been dominant within American dispensationalism.¹⁷ In this understanding, the view that all Israel is involved, not merely the leaders of the people, seems clear from the notions that the leaders represent and collaborate with the people (cf. the crowds complicity in the death of Jesus, 27:20, 25; Jesus’ condemnation of “this generation” in 23:36),¹⁸ and the evil tenants (representing the Jewish religious leadership and all who follow them) are replaced by a “nation” (ἔθνος), not just a small group (and thus a “nation” replaces the nation of Israel, rather than a subset of Israel).¹⁹ This interpretation draws particularly on Matt 8:11–12, 23:36, and 27:25, recognizing similar ideas in these passages in Matthew.

¹⁴ *Comm. Isa.* 1:29–30; quoted in Keating 2013, 122.

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.36.1–2; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.23; *Comm. Jo.* 10.16; Maldonat, *Commentarii in quatuor Evangelistas* 21:43; Walker 1967, 82; Menninger 1994, 33–34, 152–153; Trilling 1964, 55–65; Beare 1981, 430–431; Morris 1992, 544; Fenton 1963, 345; Jeremias 1963, 70, 77; Abel 1971, 149, 151; Bornkamm 1963, 43; McNeile 1915, 311; Robinson 1975, 449. Davies and Allison remark that this is “the dominant interpretation in Christian history,” (Davies and Allison 1997, 3:189).

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.* 68.2; Euthymius Zigabenus, *PG* 129.568; Bruner 2004, 381–382; Schnackenburg 2002, 206–207; Grundmann 1968, 464; Hagner 1995, 623; Hare 1993, 249; Osborne 2010, 791; Sabourin 1982, 65; Meier 1979, 150; France 2007, 310; Senior 1998, 243; Yarbrough 2011, 119; Foster 2004, 232; Gundry 1994, 430; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:184; Carter 2000, 430; Levine 1988, 4, 239.

¹⁷ Turner 2010, 709–710.

¹⁸ Olmstead 2011, 118–124; Luz 2005, 3:42; Hagner 1995, 617; Hendriksen 1973, 786; Osborne 2010, 790–791.

¹⁹ Olmstead 2011, 127–131; Luz 2005, 3:42; Hare 1993, 248; Osborne 2010, 792; Sabourin 1982, 772, fn. 28; Boring 1995, 413–415; Beare 1981, 431.

Some interpreters think that this verse communicates not just a transfer, but also the final and definitive rejection of the Jews as a whole.²⁰ Leopold Sabourin comments, “Because she has resisted God’s grace, rejected the prophetic exhortation, killed God’s envoys, even his own son, the Jewish nation loses [sic] her privileges as first-born, as chosen people... Israel becomes like any other nation, with the added guilt of infidelity...”²¹ Others rightly think this transfer does not entail such a complete rejection of historical Israel, but only the rejection of those who reject Jesus, with some pointing to passages which allude to the privileged place of Israel and future hope of salvation (e.g. continuing focus on mission to Israel, 10:23; future hope of repentance, 23:39).²²

Alternatively, many interpreters limit the reference of the verse to a condemnation and replacement of the Jewish religious leadership alone, often in reaction to the previous understanding.²³ Anthony Saldarini, a key representative of this view, claims, “[Matthew] does not say that believers-in-Jesus are a new or true Israel, nor that they are a replacement for Israel. Commentators who claim that Matthew implies this are reading in second-century Christian theology.”²⁴ Exegetically, these interpreters support this view by pointing to, e.g., the lack of any explicit reference to Gentiles (understanding ἔθνος as “people” in a general sense or as a non-ethnic group); the surrounding context of Jesus’ conflict with the Jewish religious establishment (21:18–22:14); the clear indication that the leaders understood Jesus’ parable (and the parable of the two sons before it, 21:28–

²⁰ Trilling 1964, 55–65, 95–96; Green *Matthew*, 35–36; Meier 1979, 17, 55, n. 19, 150; Kingsbury 1975, 156; Sabourin 1982, 772;

²¹ Sabourin 1982, 772.

²² Gundry 1994, 393–394; Bruner 2004, 383; Hare 1993, 250; Osborne 2010, 793–794; Carter 2000, 600, fn. 25; Hagner 2013, 22; Stanton 1992, 158–159; Boring 1995, 415.

²³ Gundry 1994, 430; Keener 1999, 511; Turner 2008, 515–519; Talbert 2010, 252; Milavec 1989, 107; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:188–189; Carter 2000, 424; Levine 1988, 203–204; Overman 1996, 302–304; Saldarini 1994, 59–63; Kloppenborg 2006, 193; Hannan 2006, 180–182; Snodgrass 1983, 91–93; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 277; Keener 1999, 515.

²⁴ Saldarini 1994, 60.

32) as spoken against them (21:45), while the crowds considered Jesus to be a prophet (21:46); the features of the parable, indicating that the problem was with the tenants (the leadership), not the vineyard (Israel). These leaders' roles as guides to the people of God are given to the entire Jesus community,²⁵ and/or to a particular subset of the Jesus community (sometimes understood to be the apostles).²⁶ Often this view sees the dispute of Jesus and/or Matthew with the Jewish leadership as an intramural, Jewish debate, with the new nation of 21:43 being an eschatological remnant of Israel.²⁷ Apart from exegetical arguments, a major concern voiced by this view is to avoid a conclusion that would promote supersessionism and/or anti-Judaism (often considered together in this view), variously conceived, as biblical.²⁸

A further extension of this interpretation does not think ἔθνος refers specifically to Jesus' followers or leaders of the church, nor does the verse refer to the salvation-historical replacement of Israel; rather, the passage is simply a warning of future judgment and call to repentance for those who do not respond to and follow Jesus (and John the Baptist, cf. 21:32).²⁹ The ἔθνος is a group defined loosely by obedience to God's will or love.³⁰ According to Ulrich Luz, v. 43 "is not about the church taking the place of Israel but an appeal to those who thus far did not belong to Israel to bring

²⁵ Keener 1999, 515; Turner 2008, 518; Carter 2000, 430. Some commentators speak of a democratizing or egalitarian move here, e.g., Gundry 1994, 429–430; Levine 1988, 211.

²⁶ Nolland 2005, 879; Overman 1996, 302–304; Talbert 2010, 252; Milavec 1989, 107; Saldarini 1994, 59–61; Turner 2002, 60; Kloppenborg 2006, 194.

²⁷ Turner 2008, 516; Carter 2000, 429; Milavec 1989, 107; Harrington 1991, 303–305; Overman 1996, 302–304; Saldarini 1994, 59–63; Sim 1998, 148–149.

²⁸ Turner 2008, 518–519; Saldarini 2001, 170–173; Hultgren 2000, 372–374; Milavec 1989, 81–85.

²⁹ Overman 1996, 303–304; Bornkamm 1963, 43; Hummel, 1966, 149; Marguerat 1981, 317–323; Luz 2005, 3:42–43 rejects the interpretation that ἔθνος refers to the church or to Gentiles, but does think this undefined group replaces Israel as a whole, according to the passage.

³⁰ Overman 1996, 303–304; Luz 2005, 3:43; Mussner 1967, 131; Marguerat 1981, 322; Levine 1988, 4, 239; partially, Keener 1999, 516, who appreciates that this verse obviates possible dependence on group membership of any kind.

fruits.”³¹ The thrust of the verse makes the deciding factor faith in action, demolishing any mere appeal to synagogue/church affiliation or ethnic descent as sufficient for inclusion in God’s people.³²

1.2 The Interpretive Framework of This Study

Having outlined important interpretive variations in Matt 21:43, I proceed to outline the framework of my approach to the interpretation of the identity and function of the ἔθνος in v. 43. In this section, I begin first (section 1.2.1) by outlining a set of hermeneutical assumptions that act as foundations for the study. Second (section 1.2.2), I present a brief overview of basic characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew as a text, including its provenance, authorship, and date.

1.2.1 Hermeneutical Presuppositions

As any interpreter, I undertake this study with a set of presuppositions. The hermeneutical framework driving this study is critical-realist, centered on the historical meaning of the text as determined by the author for the intended audience.³³

Operating under the hermeneutical recognition that I am an interpreter standing in and influenced by the reception history of this text,³⁴ this study began with a brief history of interpretation, and is in critical dialogue throughout with various interpreters of

³¹ Luz 2005, 3:43.

³² Levine 1988, 207, 210–211, 239.

³³ Thus following generally the approaches of Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 2004, 185–188; Dunn 2003, 110–125, who cites the work of Ben F. Meyer 1989, 32–37; cf. detailed discussion regarding the viability of author-centered meaning in Vanhoozer 1998, 29–32, *passim*; on critical realism, cf. 299–303.

³⁴ Hans Georg Gadamer’s “wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein” or “historically effected consciousness” operating in the “Wirkungsgeschichte,” or “effective history” of the text, cf. Gadamer, 1992, 301f., 341f.; Rowland and Boxall 2013, 206–207. Rather than trying to reconstruct the actual mental states of the author through the text, the goal of discerning the text’s meaning as a communicative act determined by the author is more modest and realistic, despite the claims of some who would deny a stable, historical, textual meaning apart from the interpretation of the reader.

Matthew. The goal in such interaction is to acknowledge and better understand my own indebtedness to others and thereby be a more conscious, careful, and responsible interpreter.³⁵

With respect to presuppositions regarding my object of study, I understand the Gospel of Matthew as the divinely revealed word of God, one part of the canon of Scripture, which forms God's self-revelation to humanity through human authors in various historical contexts, witnessing together with the ultimate expression of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Because God is trustworthy and true, his self-revealing word, therefore, is also perfectly trustworthy and true in all that it affirms and/or denies. It is thus inerrant, "in the sense of making good its claim and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed"³⁶ in their respective historical, literary milieux. God speaks the gospel to His people through Scripture, by virtue of which Scripture is holy, inspired, and inerrant.³⁷ A primary motivation of my undertaking this study of the textual meaning of Matthew is to better understand what God is communicating for the Christian church's life and thought today.³⁸

Therefore, with respect to my hermeneutical methodology generally, I undertake this study by examining the historical, literary, and theological aspects of the given passage.³⁹ The study of these three aspects follows directly from my understanding of the

³⁵ Cf. discussion in Luz 2006, 124–126, though I do not agree that a study of reception history "makes it difficult, if not impossible to say that this or that interpretation of a biblical text is clearly and definitely false", 127. See also Dunn 2003, 122–123.

³⁶ The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy: Exposition, "Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation."

³⁷ Cf. discussion in Webster 2003, 31–39.

³⁸ Cf. the conviction of Peter Stuhlmacher that biblical theology has its ultimate goal, beyond historical research, in describing "the path God took through Christ to humanity to lead them to himself and to salvation," thus laying the foundation of the Church's testimony of faith, Stuhlmacher 1995, 88.

³⁹ For this triad as an organizing hermeneutical framework, cf., e.g., Köstenberger and Patterson 2011, *passim*; Wright 1992, 14–28.

nature of Scripture just described. Scripture is the literary production of human authors in historical contexts now separated from the reader. Therefore, a rigorous and critical pursuit of the historical realities internal and external to the text, along with the literary and linguistic features of the text in its native context, is essential for allowing the text to speak for itself as much as possible, rather than allowing the present context of the reader to dictate its meaning.⁴⁰ History, moreover, is the place of divine revelation, and as God acts in history to reveal himself, such salvation-history as understood and interpreted in the Bible is the subject matter of biblical theology (thus history and theology should not ultimately be separated in biblical interpretation).⁴¹ Due to the inevitably theological nature of the human discourse in Scripture, as well as to God's own communication of himself through this discourse and salvation history, this study must strive to account for and describe the theology of this passage as well. The faith-based aspects of this approach do not thereby rule out critical analysis of historicity⁴² or the ethical implications of this text.⁴³ The inerrant nature of this text does not provide answers to historical and ethical questions regarding the text.

Proposing to analyze the meaning and function of ἔθνος in Matt 21:43 as words of Jesus in his historical context necessarily presupposes an historical framework of analysis. This study investigates the historicity of Jesus' dispute with religious leadership groups in the temple, Matthew 21:43 in the parable of the wicked tenants as words of

⁴⁰ For a similar understanding, cf. Thielman 2005, 31; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 2004, 186–189.

⁴¹ Hafemann 2002, 16, 21; cf. similar concerns in Deines 2013, 6.

⁴² Cf. discussion on this dichotomy between faith and historical inquiry and the need for a robustly theistic historiography in Deines 2013, 1–8.

⁴³ For a contrasting view, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's assertions that an approach committed to verbal inspiration and inerrancy "eschews a critical the*logical hermeneutics that takes the linguisticity and historicity of biblical texts into account" and "obscures the power relations and interests at work in biblical texts and interpretations," Schüssler Fiorenza 2009, 66.

Jesus, and the particular audience (groups within the Jewish religious leadership) with whom Jesus was in conflict. The present study assumes that the historical Jesus is historically accessible as interpreted through the Gospel of Matthew, rather than assuming that the interpretive nature of Matthew's presentation of Jesus thereby renders such pursuits impossible, or possible only after one eliminates the interpretive framework of Matthew and his sources.⁴⁴ Matthew's gospel is a construction of social memory, one that offers evidence of how those among the earliest followers of Jesus remembered him, allowing for historical extrapolation beyond these memories to the historical Jesus himself.⁴⁵ This perspective also assumes the need for critical examination of Matthew's record to understand its particular relationship to the historical Jesus who inspired his gospel, and its relationships to other gospels.⁴⁶ This study assumes that one cannot simply peel back the interpretation of the historical Jesus in early Christian literature to arrive at a more objective and historically authentic Jesus; there is no pristine, un-interpreted data to be culled from these texts. Historically, it is not advantageous to jettison these interpretations of Jesus, for they are our closest historical links to him.⁴⁷

In examining the historical authenticity of Jesus' words in 21:43, this study critically interacts with criteria of authenticity, using them as guides for the argumentation in chapter 2 that Matthew's narrative plausibly records the words of Jesus

⁴⁴ See Dunn's discussion regarding the historical value of an interested reporter, rather than seeking a neutral Jesus un-interpreted by the Gospels within the Gospel material itself, Dunn 2003, 127–132; cf. also the defense of source criticism and optimism concerning the possibilities for historical knowledge in the study of Josephus, Schwartz 2013, 1–26.

⁴⁵ See the "social memory" approach explained and argued for by Keith in contrast to the more traditional, strictly criteria-based approach (Keith 2011, 27–70).

⁴⁶ This is particularly important when comparing Matthew's narrative of the parable of the wicked tenants with Mark and Luke, who do not have a parallel statement of Matt 21:43.

⁴⁷ As argued in Dunn 2003, 130–131; Keith 2011, 61–65; Schröter 2013, 55–77.

in their historical setting.⁴⁸ The primary criteria important for this study include multiple attestation and dissimilarity (i.e. the revised criterion of “historical plausibility” by Theissen and Winter).⁴⁹ The reality that an event or saying is multiply attested by independent sources increases the probability of authenticity, though a singly attested datum cannot be discounted solely on this basis given the paucity of historical evidence.⁵⁰ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Gospel of Thomas each record the parable of the wicked tenants, though with differences which must be analyzed to discern the probability that Matt 21:43 is plausibly representative of the historical Jesus. Concerning the criterion of dissimilarity, rather than assuming that the historical Jesus would be found in material only dissimilar and distinctive to both Judaism and early Christianity, this study seeks to determine whether and to what extent Matt 21:43 fits within his Palestinian Jewish environment (while allowing for individuality of expression), and how v. 43 would also function plausibly as a foundation (and thus not merely a later creation) for Matthew’s understanding.⁵¹ For example, this study will argue that Jesus’ words in 21:43 are plausibly similar to other Jewish criticisms of the religious establishment. This criterion is also important for this study because of the common argument that Matt 21:43 too closely follows the redactional tendencies of Matthew and thus cannot be historically authentic to Jesus. This study will argue against the use of this criterion to deem Matt 21:43 inauthentic as a creation of Matthew.

⁴⁸ For the limitations of these criteria in general see the discussion in Allison 2011, 3–30.

⁴⁹ Cf. discussion in Theissen and Winter 2002, 172–212; Keener 2009, 155–159; Porter 2014, 82–99; Porter 2003, Webb 2009, 57–74.

⁵⁰ Keener 2009, 155; Webb 2009, 61; Porter 2014, 95.

⁵¹ See summary of Theissen and Winter’s “Criterion of Historical Plausibility,” in Theissen and Winter 2002, 211–212; Wright 1996, 132; Keener 2009, 157; Webb 2009, 64–67; Porter 2014, 91.

1.2.2 Provenance, Authorship, and Date of the Gospel of Matthew

The interpretation of Matt 21:43 and its context is affected by the determination of the author, the situation of the community from which the gospel arose, the intended audience, and even the date of the gospel. For example, questions concerning whether the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 implies inclusion of Gentiles are influenced by prior decisions concerning whether Matthew and his community included Gentiles. Questions concerning whether 21:43 refers implicitly to the destruction of the temple are influenced by one's dating of the gospel before or after its actual destruction in A.D. 70. I set out here my working assumptions within which this study proceeds, and in the course of the study I will interact with the discussion on these introductory matters as relevant for the interpretation of Matt 21:43.

The most significant and perhaps most heavily debated introductory matter regards the provenance of Matthew: from what sort of community did Matthew's gospel arise, and to whom was it written? Richard Bauckham's very plausible response to these questions is to posit that Matthew's gospel (along with the other gospels) was written for an indefinite Christian audience (whoever might encounter the gospel as it circulated), and was shaped by the author's numerous experiences in multiple Christian communities in the latter part of the first century A.D. (rather than a single community).⁵² On the other hand, many interpreters continue to debate the precise make-up of *the* Matthean community (the community or communities of Christians whose views the gospel writer represents). The two main interpretations are that Matthew's gospel represents the viewpoint of a Christian community that had separated clearly with Judaism (*extra*

⁵² Bauckham 1998, 9–48.

muros, “outside the walls”), or the viewpoint of a Christian community that still saw itself as within Judaism (*intra muros*, “within the walls”).⁵³ Key pieces of evidence in this debate include the meaning and relevance of: Jesus’ statement (and/or Matthew’s editorial addition) in 21:43; the reference to the “Jews” and the story of the theft of Jesus’ body in circulation among them (28:12–15); the Christology of Matthew; the reference to “their” or “your” synagogues (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34); the references to the church (16:18; 18:17); the place of Torah and its observance relative to Sabbath, food laws, and circumcision (e.g. 5:17–20; 12:1–14); the extent of mission as it relates to Jews and/or Gentiles (28:18–20); and the relationship to Gentiles generally.⁵⁴ Often the proposed characteristics of Matthew’s community are derived particularly from redactional evidence interpreted in a historicizing manner⁵⁵ as a witness to the Matthean community’s practice (e.g. Matthew’s addition of “or on a Sabbath” to Jesus’ words in Matt 24:20/Mark 13:18 as evidence of the Matthean community’s Sabbath observance).⁵⁶ A further difficulty is that distinguishing Matthew’s community as being either within Judaism, or in some sense separate from Judaism, surely differs depending on one’s perspective: perhaps those within Matthew’s Christian community desired to stress their continuity with Judaism, while non-Christian Jews would have viewed their behavior and beliefs as a departure from Judaism.⁵⁷ Additionally, it is important to recognize that just as there was not a completely homogenous understanding of Judaism in the first century,

⁵³ Sim 2011, 33–34, citing Stanton’s earlier review of Matthean scholarship, Stanton 1985, 1890–1951. For representative monographs of the *intra muros* view, see Saldarini 1994; Overman 1996, 8–16; for the *extra muros* view, see Stanton 1992, 148–168; Foster 2004, 20–21, *passim*; Deines 2005, *passim*. See further bibliography in Sim 2011, 38–39; discussion and bibliography in Deines 2008, 53–70.

⁵⁴ Sim 2011, 36–42; Foster 2004, 5, 22–79.

⁵⁵ I.e., reading past the surface level of Jesus’ words to various interlocutors to understand the narrative as a disguised commentary on contemporary issues for the author, disconnected from the historical Jesus.

⁵⁶ For a critique of this way of reading the gospels, see Watson 1998, 195–217.

⁵⁷ See Tuckett 2014a, 475–482.

so too for Jewish Christianity; there were differences in what Law-observance meant among Christians with a high view of the Law.⁵⁸

While recognizing Bauckham's important observations and arguments regarding the intended audience and provenance of Matthew, it is worthwhile and important to try to define the distinctive perspective of Matthew's assumptions and aims as a gospel writer (even if understood as involving his experience in several communities).⁵⁹ The working hypothesis of this study is that Matthew wrote to and reflects Christian communities which were engaged in varying degrees of conflict and mission with Jewish communities, yet had separated from them on the basis of Jesus' interpretation of Torah and mission to the Gentiles (the *extra muros* view).⁶⁰ The Gospel of Matthew functions to strengthen the mission work of Christians who read and heard it. It represents one side of a missionary engagement with non-Christian Judaism over the meaning of the gospel (as perhaps indicated in, e.g., 28:11–15), aimed at conversion, not only reformation of Judaism.⁶¹

The author of the gospel of Matthew was a Jewish-Christian writer, quite possibly Matthew, the disciple of Jesus, which is the hypothesis of this study.⁶² If Matthew was the

⁵⁸ Deines 2008, 54, n. 3.

⁵⁹ Thus Nolland 2005, 18.

⁶⁰ So, e.g., Stanton, 1992, 124; Foster 2004, 140–143, 248–252; Deines 2008, 62–84; Gundry 2005a, 111–112.

⁶¹ Osborne 2010, 31–32; Nolland 2005, 18; Gundry 2005a, 115–118.

⁶² Characteristics of the gospel that form evidence for a specifically *Jewish-Christian* author include redactional interests and special material, for example: Jesus as the son of David, with a genealogy linked to Israel's history (1:1–17); the presentation of Jesus' early life like that of Moses; the limiting of Jesus' ministry to Israel (10:5–6, 23; 15:24); the emphasis on scriptural fulfillment (e.g. 1:23; 2:17–18, 23); the material related to Jesus' teaching on the Law (e.g. 5:17–20); cf. Davies and Allison 1988, 25–26, who also cite possible knowledge of Hebrew (Davies and Allison 1988, 33, 44). An important counter-example is the strange form of the *Shema* in Matt 22:37, which does not seem to match the sense of Dt 6:5 (the faculty of strength from the MT and LXX is missing in 22:37) and possibly points to the author's unfamiliarity with the MT or LXX form of the *Shema* (unlikely if the author was Jewish, given the frequency of its recitation); cf. Tuckett 2014a, 486–491.

author, this settles the issue of his Jewish character.⁶³ Yet several characteristics of the gospel seem to present counter-evidence for a Jewish author (e.g., the form of the *Shema* in 22:37, oddly divergent from Dt 6:5). Moreover, the evidence in this debate is primarily evidence for certain interests of the author rather than his ethnicity.

The Gospel of Matthew was likely written sometime before 70 A.D. If one dates Papias' mention of Matthew early (A.D. 95–110), and assumes Papias does actually refer to this gospel, this mention forms the terminus ad quem.⁶⁴ If one sees dependence on Matthew in the letters of Ignatius (who died in A.D. 107), the terminus ad quem would be closer to A.D. 100.⁶⁵ Essentially, debate centers on whether Matthew should be dated before the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem, or after (and thus whether Matthew betrays knowledge of the conflict or not). Evidence and arguments for a later date include:⁶⁶ the fact that Matthew is dependent on Mark (which a claimed consensus dates to the late 60s or just after the war), requiring that Matthew must be dated after the war; the possible evidence that Matt 22:7 (considered by some as a Matthean addition, cf. Luke 14:16–24) and ch. 24 contain only slightly veiled references to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70;⁶⁷ the trinitarian formula of 28:19, which is too developed and

⁶³ That Matthew was the author of the gospel has significant and uncontested support from early Christian writings, though first recorded by Papias (perhaps 95–110 A.D.), whose writings are in turn referred to by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16). Papias' witness regarding Matthew's composition involves a reference to his compiling sayings (τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο) in Aramaic (Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ, Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16; this phrase could also be interpreted to refer to Matthew's Jewish presentation of Jesus rather than the Aramaic language of composition), which adds complexity to the idea that he was the author of the gospel (in Greek), but does not necessarily conflict with it (perhaps best understood as a primary source of the extant Gospel of Matthew). See the discussion in Yarbrough 1983, 181–191; Gundry 2005b, 49–73; Davies and Allison 1988, 8–17, esp. 8–9, fn. 12; Osborne 2010, 33–34; Nolland 2005, 2–4; Kürzinger 1963, 108–115, cited in Stanton 1992, 116.

⁶⁴ Davies and Allison 1988, 128.

⁶⁵ Davies and Allison 1988, 130.

⁶⁶ Drawn from Davies and Allison 1988, 131–138; Osborne 2010, 35; Sim 1998, 33–40.

⁶⁷ Davies and Allison 1988, 131–132; Sim 1998, 34; Carter 2000, 16–17.

requires a date closer to the second century;⁶⁸ and the possibility that Matthew betrays knowledge and interaction with post-70 rabbinic developments in his narration.⁶⁹

Evidence and arguments for a date before the war include: texts purported to refer to Jerusalem's destruction need not do so (22:7; 23:38; 24:2);⁷⁰ the period of development of the term "Rabbi" could include the time of Jesus;⁷¹ the animosity and distance from Jewish leaders in Matthew need not reflect only a period of time after the war, and could be seen as a Jewish sectarian conflict;⁷² the description of judgment in ch. 24 does not precisely fit the events of the war, nor would the immediacy of the following parousia in 24:29 fit well if the events which precede had already happened for Matthew.⁷³ That Matthew records Jesus' sayings regarding matters which do not apply after A.D. 70 (e.g., payment of the temple tax in 17:24–27), or frequently refers to the Sadducees in his narrative does not provide strong evidence for a pre-A.D. 70 date of writing, as this material could instead simply reflect the sources Matthew used.⁷⁴ Ultimately, I find the arguments for a date before the war more convincing, particularly because it is not clear how the disputed dating of Mark and Matthew's dependence necessitates a post-war dating or makes it more likely, and because Matt 22:7 is more plausibly understood as based on prophetic words of Jesus heralding future destruction of the temple (24:1–2).

⁶⁸ Davies and Allison 1988, 133;

⁶⁹ E.g. the three-fold structure of Matt 5–7 (Torah, cult, social obligations), which is similar to rabbinic discussions; the Matthean insertion of speech regarding Hos 6:6 (9:13; 12:7), an important text for reconstruction without the temple; the use of the title Rabbi (23:5–10); the evidence in the gospel pointing to the separation of the community from the synagogue, thus near the period (last quarter of the first century) in which the *birkat ha-minim* were formulated; cf. Davies and Allison 1988, 134–138; Osborne 2010, 35;

⁷⁰ Nolland 2005, 14; Gundry 1994, 436–437, 600.

⁷¹ Nolland 2005, 15.

⁷² Nolland 2005, 15; Osborne 2010, 35; Morris 1992, 10; Sim 1998, 35.

⁷³ Nolland 2005, 16–17; Morris 1992, 9.

⁷⁴ See discussion in Sim 1998, 36.

1.3 Outline of the Subsequent Study

In the following chapter, I argue that the context of 21:43 demands that one interpret the meaning of ἔθνος primarily in light of the contrast Jesus draws between this ἔθνος and the religious leadership which challenges his authority. I then further describe and argue for the historical realism of Matthew 21:43 in its narrative setting, spoken by the historical Jesus to his opponents in the temple precinct. This will involve surveying the historical character of Jesus' opponents, as well as arguing for the authenticity of the narrative setting of Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants, the authenticity of the parable itself, and the authenticity of Jesus' words in 21:43 specifically.

In chapter 3, I exegetically analyze v. 43, particularly focusing on the identity and function of ἔθνος on the basis of the historical framework set out in chapter 2. This will involve establishing the connection of v. 43 to the parable of the wicked tenants, the meaning of the kingdom of God in v. 43, the nature of the kingdom's transfer, the lexical meaning of ἔθνος, the meaning of bearing fruit, and the nature of the contrast between ἔθνος and "you." In the final section of chapter 3, I examine the relationship of the identity and function of ἔθνος in v. 43 with other portrayals of the identity and function of Jesus' disciples in Matthew.

Chapter 2

Situating Matthew 21:43 in Historical Context

This chapter provides historical foundations for the exegetical analysis of Matt 21:43 in chapter 3. The goals of this chapter are, first, to argue for the historical realism of the narrative record of Jesus' words in Matt 21:33–46, and, second, to establish the historical aspects of the interpretive framework used to analyze the identity and function of the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 in chapter 3. First, I offer arguments for understanding Matt 21:43 as primarily addressed to groups representing Jewish religious leadership in Jerusalem (section 2.1). Second, I then provide an overview of the historical characteristics of Jesus' dialogue partners as recorded in Matthew (section 2.2). Third, I present a set of arguments supporting the authenticity of the narrative frame which Matthew provides for Jesus' saying in Matt 21:43, namely, during the public debate in the temple precinct after Jesus' action in the temple (section 2.3). Fourth, I discuss the authenticity of the parable of the wicked tenants as a parable of the historical Jesus, in order that I may then argue for the authenticity of the words of Jesus in Matt 21:43 (section 2.4).

2.1 Initial Arguments for Interpreting Matt 21:43 in Light of Jesus' Direct Addressees

A foundation of this study is the contention that the text of 21:43 should be primarily understood in light of its historical context as an utterance of the historical Jesus to a particular audience in the temple precinct. If this is an error, the rationale for an in-depth evaluation of the historicity of Matt 21:33–46 (this chapter) and the subsequent exegesis following this trajectory (chapter 3) is baseless. Therefore, in this section, I first offer arguments in support of my position that one should interpret this verse in light of this

particular audience. Second, I examine who this historical audience was based on the synoptic parallels with this parable.

The interpreters surveyed above who restrict the referent of “you” to Jesus’ addressees in Matt 21:43 point to the following evidence: the narrative setting for the parable (as well as the parable of the two sons before it, 21:28–32) is in response to the questions of the chief priests and elders of the people concerning Jesus’ authority (21:23); Matthew records a similar group as knowing that Jesus spoke the parables against them, while the crowds regarded Jesus as a prophet; the parable of the wicked tenants itself concerns rebellious leadership (allegorically referring to Jesus’ addressees), seen most clearly in the concluding destruction of the tenants by the owner and the transfer of the vineyard to different tenants (v. 41, the parallel of v. 43); the use of ἔθνος does not demand a “national” or ethnic understanding, it can refer to virtually any group of people, and perhaps refers merely to a new leadership sub-group.¹ As noted above, the counter-evidence for this view includes, first, that the leaders and the people are not distinguished so neatly in this way in the rest of Matthew’s gospel (e.g., 23:36; 27:20, 25). Second, the use of ἔθνος likely alludes to a new people of God, not simply a sub-group of leaders, implying a contrast with all who reject Jesus, not merely their leaders.² In section 3.4.4 of chapter 3, I develop the further argument that even a change in leadership, given the historical situation of the verse, likely implies a redefinition of the people of God.

¹ Thus, particularly the view that ἔθνος refers to Gentiles who replace the Jews as a whole is therefore undermined; cf. Gundry 1994, 430; Keener 1999, 511; Turner 2008, 515–519; Talbert 2010, 252; Milavec 1989, 107; Davies and Allison 1997, 188–189; Carter 2000, 424; Levine 1988, 203–204; Overman 1996, 302–304; Saldarini 1994, 59–63; Kloppenborg 2006, 193; Hannan 2006, 180–182; Snodgrass 1983, 91–93; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 277; Keener 1999, 515.

² Argued perhaps most cogently by Olmstead, who extends this argument to include the notion that the ἔθνος replaces not just those who reject Jesus but the people of Israel as a whole (Olmstead 2011).

This study will ultimately argue that Matt 21:43 refers not merely to a transfer of leadership but a reconception of God's people, that ἔθνος does refer to the people of God constituted by the followers of Jesus the Messiah, who will replace the Jewish leadership and all those who similarly reject Jesus (this topic will be discussed further in chapter 3). However, this does not dismiss the evidence that Jesus directly addressed members of the religious leadership *primarily* in this passage. Jesus chose to craft this parable to directly criticize his authoritative interlocutors. One misconstrues the text if one ignores the implications for *all* who reject Jesus as these leaders do, but one misconstrues the text just the same if one ignores the particular people and their positions of leadership which Jesus addresses with this parable. In light of this argumentation, I proceed with this study seeking to interpret the identity and function of ἔθνος in 21:43 *primarily* in contrast to the religious leadership whom Jesus directly addressed, and *secondarily* in connection to the wider themes of Matthew's theological conception of Jesus' community of disciples.

The further question arises, then, concerning precisely whom Jesus addressed directly in Matt 21:43 (i.e., who, precisely, is "you"?).³ Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that the setting for Jesus' delivery of the parable of the wicked tenants is in response to some of the Jewish religious leadership after they questioned Jesus' authority in the temple precinct (cf. chief priests, scribes, and elders in Mark 11:27–33; the same in Luke 20:1–8; chief priests and elders of the people in Matt 21:23–27). Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that these groups respond to Jesus' parable of the tenants as though it was spoken against them particularly, while the nearby crowds remain positively disposed to Jesus (cf. the unwillingness to move against Jesus because of the crowd in Mark 12:12;

³ The version in *Gos. Thom.* 65 has no mention of Jesus' audience, and is thus of no help for this question.

Luke 20:19; Matt 21:46, noting Matthew's additional comment that the crowd held Jesus to be a prophet).

However, Matthew's narrative differs, despite the continuity noted above.

Matthew's narrative deviates from Mark and Luke in three relevant ways: (a) Jesus first tells the parable of the two sons before the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:28–32), and the respondents to the parable of the tenants respond to both parables (Matt 21:45); (b) there is no explicit mention of “scribes” in the designations of those who challenge Jesus' authority in Matthew, only chief priests and elders of the people (Matt 21:23, cf. Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1); (c) the respondents to Jesus' parable of the tenants include the chief priests and Pharisees in Matthew, as opposed to chief priests and scribes in Luke 20:19, and a bare “they” in Mark 12:12 (referring back to chief priests, scribes, and elders, Mark 11:27).

These deviations do not contradict the narratives of Mark and Luke; rather, the three historical records should be viewed complementarily. First, though the parable of the two sons appears only in Matt 21:27–28, its inclusion does not change the addressees of the parable of the wicked tenants told subsequently, as the addressees respond to both parables.

Second, though Matthew's narrative does not mention scribes among those who challenge Jesus' authority just prior to the parables, Matthew does record that the scribes and chief priests challenge Jesus just after his actions in the temple concerning his reception of the cry “Hosanna to the son of David” (21:15–16; cf. Mark 11:18; Luke 19:39, 47). The omission of scribes in Matt 21:45 does not exclude them entirely from view or guard them from Jesus' condemnation, for some opposed Jesus elsewhere in the

gospel, and Mark and Luke witness to their involvement here.⁴ Historically, as attested in Matthew's gospel, scribes often played a supporting role to ruling classes such as the chief priests and elders. The scribes affiliated with the chief priests and elders as elsewhere in Matthew's gospel should be understood as an implied addressee of Matt 21:43, given the witnesses of Mark and Luke to their inclusion.

Similarly, while Matthew omits the elders from the respondents in 21:45, they are likely implied addressees (as attested in Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Jesus spoke the parable of the two sons in response to their questioning, (21:23–27, 28–32), following this immediately with the parable of the tenants. There seems to be no particular indication that the elders were excluded from Jesus' speech, given that the parable of the tenants condemns generally those who lead God's people while rejecting God's work in Jesus (the same can be said of Luke's version, which also omits elders as respondents, but retains them as original dialogue partners, 20:1, 19).

Rather, the omission of the scribes and elders as respondents and the inclusion of the Pharisees in 21:45 are likely a function of either the multiple, possible options for designating Jesus' interlocutors given the diverse groups in this setting;⁵ or Matthew's desire to pair the chief priests and Pharisees in opposition to Jesus, as he does later in

⁴ Saldarini 2001, 159–163. Matthew also includes scribes with the chief priests and elders in Jesus' anticipation of his death at their hands (16:21). Matthew pairs the scribes with the chief priests in the court of Herod (2:4), and in another statement of Jesus concerning his death in Jerusalem by them (20:18). Matthew pairs the scribes with elders who gather to interrogate Jesus at the home of the high priest, Caiaphas (26:57, cf. the chief priests' involvement in 26:59). The scribes and elders also mocked Jesus together while he was crucified (27:41). Scribes can be characterized positively in Matthew's narrative (cf. the scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom, 13:52; the martyred scribes whom Jesus sends to those who oppose him, 23:34–36; perhaps the scribe willing to follow Jesus, 8:19), but are most often characterized in opposition to Jesus and his teaching (e.g., 5:20; 7:29; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1–2; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29).

⁵ Argued by von Wahlde 1996, 519. In this case, as argued above, Matthew's "chief priests and Pharisees" should not be considered exclusive of the groups mentioned in Mark and Luke, but representative.

their collaboration to secure a tomb guard from Pilate (27:62; cf. their involvement with Herodians against Jesus, 22:15; their plot to destroy Jesus, 12:14).⁶ This need not mean that Matthew invented their involvement in questioning Jesus in the temple precinct (cf. their additional participation in 22:15–22, 34–39).⁷ Nor does this provide evidence that Matthew was unconcerned about the distinctions between different Jewish groups in his gospel.⁸ Rather, the passing reference to the involvement of the Pharisees in this verse seems to argue for its verisimilitude, for Matthew does not seem to single out the Pharisees in the temple conflict narrative, and the scene remains instigated by the chief priests, elders, and affiliated scribes (21:23–22:46).⁹ Nor need Matthew's unique designations contradict that of Mark and Luke, who attest to chief priests, elders, and scribes as direct addressees. Mark attests explicitly that the chief priests, elders, and scribes sent Pharisees after the parable of the wicked tenants to question him regarding tax payments (Mark 12:13–17; in Luke, spies of the implied chief priests and scribes pose the question, Luke 20:20). Matthew's formulation makes more explicit that Jesus spoke the parable of the wicked tenants (and thus the statement of v. 43) against a wide portion of Jewish religious leadership (including Pharisees), pronouncing judgment upon them for their opposition to God's work in Jesus.¹⁰ That diverse groups could unite in opposition to Jesus, given the provocative tenor of his teaching and his previous behavior

⁶ Nolland 2005, 880; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 278; Davies and Allison 1997, 188; Hagner 1995, 623.

⁷ For example, Martin Pickup argues that Matthew may have designated Markan scribes as Pharisees because they very well could have been scribes partisan to the halakhah of the Pharisees (Pickup 2007, 95), rather than apparently aligned with the chief priests and elders. Perhaps the situation in the temple precinct had multiple groups of scribes and teachers variously aligned; we cannot know further, but Matthew's inclusion of Pharisees is not implausible or contradictory with our other sources.

⁸ As argued by Christine Schams based on this passage (Schams 1998, 182–183). Rather, Matthew seems to reflect the diversity of groups engaged with Jesus in this historical scene in the temple.

⁹ Von Wahlde 1996, 519. It is not as though, for example, Matthew replaced all the diverse groups represented in Mark with the Pharisees alone.

¹⁰ As noted by e.g., Gundry 1994, 431; Olmstead 2003, 149. That this is indeed the import of the parable will be argued below and in chapter 3, section 3.4.4.

in the temple, is historically plausible (to be argued further below, particularly regarding Pharisees and chief priests, in section 2.3.2).¹¹

In this study, I interpret that the primary historical addressees of Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants and the statement of Matt 21:43 included members of the chief priests, elders, their affiliated scribes, and Pharisees. Rhetorically, Jesus groups these diverse parties together as those who have opposed God as leaders of God's people. The nature of their leadership is important for understanding the identity and function of their replacement, the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43. Future references to the religious leadership or religious establishment in subsequent discussion refer to this group as Jesus' addressees. While this study designates this group as "the religious leadership," I recognize that this is not a homogenous group, given their wide diversity of roles, socio-economic standing, etc. Moreover, these groups, while directly addressed in Matt 21:43, are included with Sadducees and Herodians as opponents of Jesus. Thus the next section discusses those differences and the historical nature of these leadership groups.

2.2 An Historical Overview of Religious Leadership Groups in Matt 21:23–22:46

In this section I give a brief historical and literary overview of the major characters presented, namely ἀρχιερεῖς, πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ, φαρισαῖοι, and γραμματεῖς. I will also survey the Σαδδουκαῖοι, and Ἡρωδιανοί, given that they are linked with these other authorities in the same narrative scene, questioning Jesus in the temple precincts (21:23–22:46, concluding, "No one was able to give him an answer, nor from

¹¹ Thus one does not need to suppose that Matthew has no knowledge of the diversity of these groups on the basis of his variant designations or pairings. Cf. the conclusions of Saldarini supporting the plausibility of Matthew's presentation of Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, chief priests, and elders (Saldarini 2001, 171–173).

that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.”).¹² This overview provides a basis for further arguments concerning the historical authenticity of Jesus’ dispute with the religious leadership in the temple precinct (section 2.3 below). I focus primarily on the time of the Roman prefecture of Judea, from AD 6–41, given its relevance for the similar circumstances in which Jesus spoke Matt 21:43.

First, a brief overview of Matthew’s narrative of Jesus’ dialogical confrontations in the temple precinct is in order, as this sets the stage for further analysis. After Jesus’ demonstration in the temple (21:12–17), Matthew presents the “chief priests” (ἀρχιερεῖς) and “elders of the people” (πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ) as questioning Jesus’ authority after Jesus had entered the temple once more and begun teaching (21:23–27). This episode of questioning continues, with Jesus interacting with various interlocutors until 22:46, in which verse Matthew gives a summary statement signaling its end. During this discussion, first Jesus tells three parables (21:28–32, 33–46; 22:1–15). At the end of the second parable, that of the wicked tenants, Matthew narrates that the chief priests and the Pharisees (φαραισαῖοι) understood that Jesus spoke the two parables against them (ἀκούσαντες...τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει, 21:45). These paired groups then sought together to arrest Jesus, but they feared the crowds (ἐφοβήθησαν τοὺς ὄχλους), because they considered him a prophet (εἰς προφήτην αὐτὸν εἶχον, 21:46). After the third parable, Matthew depicts a response by the Pharisees, particularly, who gathered together for council (συμβούλιον ἔλαβον, 21:15), and then sent their disciples, along with Herodians (Ἡρῳδιανοί), to question Jesus further about payment of taxes (22:15–22). This group was ultimately astounded by his

¹² For a literary-critical overview of this passage, see Kingsbury 1987, 70–71; Olmstead 2003, 98–130.

response (καὶ ἀκούσαντες ἐθαύμασαν, 22:22). Then Sadducees (Σαδδουκαῖοι) also questioned him regarding marriage and future resurrection (22:23–33). On the basis of Jesus’ response to the Sadducees, the crowds were amazed at his teaching (οἱ ὄχλοι ἐξεπλήσσοντο ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ, 22:33). Lastly, the Pharisees (represented by a lawyer, νομικός) put another question to Jesus regarding the greatest commandment (22:34–40), after which Jesus poses a question to them (and perhaps the whole audience) about the identity of the Messiah (22:41–45). Matthew depicts Jesus as the victor in each of these confrontations, with his opponents being silenced and unable to answer his responses (22:22, 34, 46).

2.2.1 Chief Priests

In Matthew’s presentation, the chief priests and elders often appear together in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and are defined by their opposition to Jesus alongside other groups.¹³ In historical study beyond Matthew, these two groups have many commonalities as well, but are ultimately quite distinct. In this section, I consider the passages common to the chief priests and elders in Matthew before discussing the chief priests and elders individually.

The following is a brief survey of the explicit appearances of the chief priests and elders in Matthew: Jesus foresaw that it was necessary for him to suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests, elders of the people, and scribes, (16:21; of the chief priests and scribes alone, 20:18); the chief priests and scribes were angry at Jesus’ celebrated entry into the city and question him (21:15–16); the chief priests and elders of the people challenged Jesus’ authority (21:23); after having realized that Jesus criticized them with parables, the chief priests and Pharisees sought to arrest him (21:45); the chief priests and elders of the people gathered at Caiaphas’ home and plotted to arrest and kill Jesus (26:3–4); the chief priests brokered the price of

¹³ An exception to the chief priests’ opposition to Jesus occurs in Matt 2:4, in which they, alongside the scribes of the people, advise Herod regarding the magi’s questioning. The term πρεσβύτεροι also refers exceptionally to those who have handed down the halakhic traditions of the Pharisees in Matt 15:2, a group which does not overlap with “the elders” presented elsewhere in the survey below.

Judas' betrayal (26:14–15; both chief priests and the elders of the people also received the money back from Judas, 27:3–4); the chief priests and elders of the people formed the source of the posse that arrested Jesus, led by Judas (26:47); the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin (τὸ συνέδριον ὅλον) sought to bring false testimony (ψευδομαρτυρία) against Jesus in the home of Caiaphas (26:59; this same group is designated as scribes and elders in 26:57); the chief priests and elders of the people gathered for council early the next morning, deciding to have Jesus executed, and brought him to Pilate (27:1–2); the chief priests bought the Potter's field with Judas' thirty shekels of silver in fulfillment of scripture (27:6–10); the chief priests and elders brought charges against Jesus before Pilate (27:12); the chief priests and elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and condemn Jesus (27:20); the chief priests, scribes, and elders ridiculed Jesus while he hung on the cross regarding his kingship, ability to save, and sonship of God (27:41–43); the chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate for a tomb guard (27:62); the chief priests and elders received the report from some of the guards regarding the later events at the tomb, and paid them to tell a different story (28:11–15).

With respect to their described actions in Matthew's narrative, the chief priests and elders in particular match other historical data regarding the Jerusalem religious-political elite at the time of Jesus, particularly the aristocratic members of the primary legislative, religious, and civic ruling body, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Yet the elite priests were ascendant during this period. Josephus describes generally that the Jews had an aristocratic government led by priest (Josephus, *A.J.* 4.223; 5.135; 6.36, 268; 11.111; 20.229), and this is generally true of the time of Jesus, when Judea was a Roman province, and the high priesthood represented the most powerful position.¹⁴ In the period of the Roman prefecture (AD 6–41), the high priests gained influence increasingly, being the leading aristocrats among the people.¹⁵

The chief priests, as priests, were members of the priesthood by birth,¹⁶ and thus served in the temple occasionally according to a 24 month cycle¹⁷ in which they would

¹⁴ For a synthetic portrayal of evidence in keeping with this description, see McLaren 1991, 188–222.

¹⁵ Sanders 1992, 327–329; Schwartz 1990, 61; for a succinct overview of the priesthood from 37 BC to just before the Jewish war, see Schwartz 1990, 58–70.

¹⁶ Cf. the concern for priestly, ancestral purity in Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.30–37; Mason 1995, 173.

oversee the operations,¹⁸ e.g., facilitate thanksgiving and atonement sacrifices, hear vows, bless the people, and receive tithes.¹⁹ The leading priests likely represented groups of priests distinct from the vast majority of priests by wealth and/or familial ties to high priestly families.²⁰ The priesthood itself was highly diverse, with varying levels of socio-economic status and educational training, from elite landowners to subsistence level farmers.²¹ The Levites were still operative in the temple as singers, gatekeepers, and temple cleansing staff, but are far less attested in the extant sources, likely due to their lesser influence.²² Beyond the work directly situated in the temple, priests would, e.g., inspect cases of leprosy (e.g., Mark 1:44; Luke 17:14), teach the people of Israel,²³ lead in prayer,²⁴ and settle legal disputes (e.g., Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.185–187).²⁵ The tasks of keeping records, counting, calendrical observance, and the existence of the temple's own library²⁶ likely point to an overlap in priestly and scribal duties during the second temple period, though only partial.²⁷ The priesthood was responsible for control of the temple; for example, they acted to shore up its security after certain Samaritans placed human bones in the temple and its porticoes during Passover (Josephus, *A. J.* 18.29).²⁸

¹⁷ Cf. Lk 1:5–9; 1 Chr 24; Josephus, *A.J.* 7.363–365.

¹⁸ E.g., Ezek 44:10–14; Sir 45:23–24; Josephus, *A.J.* 3.191.

¹⁹ E.g., Lev 9:22–24; Num 6:23–26; Dt 21:5; Sir. 50:20–21; *Jub.* 31:12–15; IQS II, 1–5; *m. Tamid* 5:1; 7:2. Cf. Schwarz 1990, 69–70; Fletcher-Louis 2013, 696–697; Kugler 2010, 1098–1099.

²⁰ Schwarz plausibly separates two groups of chief priests having high standing predominately by affiliation with high priestly families, and chief priests who are socio-economically elite but unconnected to high priestly families, as in the case of Josephus (Schwarz 1990, 70).

²¹ Cf. the peasant high priest Phanni b. Samuel, Josephus, *B.J.* 4.155f.; Schwarz 1990, 70.

²² Cf., e.g., Barnabas the Levite, *Ac* 4:26; Philo, *Spec.* 1.156; Josephus, *A.J.* 12.138–144; 20.216–218; Stern 1976, 596–600.

²³ E.g., Lev 10:8–11; Num 31:21–24; Deut 27:9–10; 31:9–13; 33:10; Mal 2:7; Ezek 44:23; Ezra 7:10; Sir. 45:17; *Jub.* 31:12–15; 1Q28b III, 22–23; particularly in synagogues, Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.12–13.

²⁴ E.g., Ezra 9:5–15; Joel 2:17; Josephus, *A.J.* 11.326–328; 3 Macc 2.

²⁵ Fletcher-Louis 2013, 697; Kugler 2010, 1098–1099.

²⁶ E.g., Ezra 7:1–6; Neh 13:13; *Aramaic Levi Document* 9:1–18; 12:1–9; *T. Levi* 8:17; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.29–35; *A.J.* 3.38; 4.303–304; 2 Macc 2:13–15.

²⁷ Fletcher-Louis 2013, 697; Himmelfarb 2006, 15.

²⁸ McLaren 1991, 80–81.

By the time of Jesus in the early first-century, a few high priestly families of Zadokite lineage most likely formed the priestly aristocracy resident in the capital of Jerusalem, which “chief priests” likely describes more particularly.²⁹ For example, Valerius Gratus, the prefect who appointed Joseph Caiaphas as high priest, had previously appointed Eleazar, the son of his father-in-law, Annas, who had also been high priest for 9 years previously (Josephus, *A. J.* 18.31–43).³⁰ Beyond the four gospels, Josephus also witnesses to this smaller body of chief priests ruling alongside the high priest, likely consisting of former high priests and their families.³¹

2.2.2 Elders of the People

As for the elders in Matthew’s gospel, these are likely non-priestly members of the Jerusalem aristocracy, especially when paired with the chief priests.³² Joseph of Arimathea is likely an example of this group (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50, described as a member of the council, βουλευτής).³³ The elders are to be distinguished from the chief priests, yet as leading nobility of the people based in Jerusalem, they were closely associated with the chief priests, if generally subordinated to them due to the power of the high priestly families.³⁴ For example, the “chief men” (ἄνδρες οἱ πρῶτοι) took initiative to meet Vitellius as he marched his army through Judea to war with Aretas, asking that he

²⁹ Sanders 1992, 328. Though note the possibility of elite priests unconnected to these families as mentioned above, cf. McLaren 1991, 202; Fletcher-Louis 2013, 700; Mason 1995, 159–160, 175–177.

³⁰ Smallwood 1976, 159.

³¹ This is especially true of the family of Annas; *B.J.* 2.243; *A.J.* 20.197–198; 205; *Vita* 193–194; cf. the positioning of Annas and Caiaphas together, Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 19–24; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.34–35, 95; Fletcher-Louis 2013, 700; Mason 1995, 165.

³² See the helpful summary in McLaren 1991, 204–206; Sanders 1992, 329–331; Silva 2014b, 133; Twelftree 2013, 838; Deines 2008b, 858.

³³ McLaren 1991, 91.

³⁴ Cf. the reference to οἱ πρῶτοι τοῦ λαοῦ who collaborated with chief priests, and scribes to kill Jesus, Luke 19:47; Josephus, *Vita* 9; 194; the leading men of Jerusalem were often involved with chief priests, and some Pharisees, in negotiating the relationship of the Jews with their Roman rulers, Josephus, *B.J.* 2.316, 336, 405–411; McLaren 1991, 218–219; Brown 1994, 2:1429; Twelftree 2013, 838.

would not march through the land bearing offensive standards (Josephus, *A.J.* 18.120–122).³⁵ Similarly, this general group was involved in the questioning and punishment of Peter, John, and Stephen.³⁶ When the emperor Gaius ordered Petronius, legate of Syria, to erect a statue of Gaius in Jerusalem, this group was likely involved as part of the leading men who spoke with Petronius on behalf of the people.³⁷ Though the elders in Matthew were those based in Jerusalem, elders as leaders at various positions and places of Jewish life are known throughout Israel's history.³⁸ Due to their common cause with the chief priests in the Gospels, some overlap with the Sadducees is probable.

2.2.3 Sanhedrin

As the chief priests and elders formed an aristocratic center of power in Jerusalem, a further, brief discussion of their rule and function alongside the high priest in the Jerusalem Sanhedrin is also in order to further illustrate these historical figures.³⁹ The Jews were allowed a large measure of autonomous rule by their Roman rulers, a central authority of which was the Jerusalem Sanhedrin.⁴⁰ Though the precise makeup of the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus is not precisely clear,⁴¹ it was likely composed of 70

³⁵ McLaren 1991, 83–85, n. 1, which incident McLaren thinks provides supporting evidence that such men were also involved in the case of Pilate's standards, *A.J.* 18.55–59.

³⁶ Cf. the rulers and elders, Acts 4:5, 8; the γερονσία τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ, 5:21, 34; 6:12; 7:1; McLaren 1991, 102–114.

³⁷ Cf. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.185–203, esp. 192, 199; *A.J.* 18.261–308, esp. 273, 284; Philo, *Legat.* 207–333, esp. 222, 229; McLaren 1991, 114–126.

³⁸ Cf., e.g., Exod 3:16; 19:7; Num 11:16; Judg 8:14; Ruth 4:2, 9, 11; 2 Sam 3:17; 5:3; Jer 26:16–17; 1 Macc 12:6; 2 Macc 1:10; Brown 1994, 2:1428–1429.

³⁹ For detailed, if overly skeptical, discussion, see McLaren 1991, 80–126.

⁴⁰ For brief discussion, cf. Pucci Ben Zeev 1998, 430–439, drawing on the evidence of Caesar's letter concerning Jewish rule and Hyrcanus' appointment as high priest in *A.J.* 14.190–195; Paul's authorization from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to arrest and punish Jews in Damascus (Acts 9:2; 22:19; 26:11); the authority of Jews to flog Paul in Corinth (2 Cor 11:24; Ac 18:12–16). See also Smallwood 1976, 144–150.

⁴¹ For the Sanhedrin as authoritative in the NT, cf., e.g., Matt 26:59; Mark 14:55; 15:1; John 11:47; Acts 5:27, 34; 6:12; 22:30; 23:1, 15, 28; 24:20. For arguments against the uncritical use of Mishnaic texts to reconstruct the nature of a Sanhedrin, and against certainty about a singular Sanhedrin in the first

members (cf. *m. Sanh.* 1:6), and led by the high priest, Caiaphas.⁴² The Sanhedrin was likely an established council in this period that met as needed to discuss and decide upon political, religious, and legal issues of importance, though its character likely varied widely given particular historical circumstances.⁴³ Though the Sanhedrin's power was limited under Roman rule⁴⁴ (except occasionally in cases of religious offenses),⁴⁵ in the absence of a king, it formed the highest Jewish authority for the people of Israel by virtue of its composition, consisting of the priestly and lay elite.⁴⁶ They appear to have had security personnel at their disposal.⁴⁷ As would be expected, Josephus specifically recalls that the aristocracy had to account for popular opinion in their deliberation, opinion often linked with the Pharisees (Josephus, *A.J.* 13.288, 297–298, 400–402; 18.15, 17).

2.2.4 Sadducees

In Matthew's narrative, the Sadducees are often paired with the Pharisees (only in Matthew), and together with the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees confront Jesus in the temple precinct.

century, see Kee 1999, 52–63; Grabbe 2007, 13–15 (cf. particularly *m. Sanh.* 11:4, at once referring to the post-70 court in Javneh, and the non-existent court in Jerusalem). For further discussion, see Schwartz 1990, 62–64.

⁴² Caiaphas was appointed by the prefect Valerius Gratus, *A.J.* 18.35; for the high priest as head of the Sanhedrin, cf. 1 Macc 14:44; Matt 26:57; Acts 5:17; 24:1; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.194; *A.J.* 20.200, 251; cf. Twelftree 2013, 838.

⁴³ See particularly the argumentation against a permanent “conciliar supremacy” throughout the Second Temple period in Goodblatt 1994, 77–130; cf. also Grabbe 2007, 16–19; Keener 2013, 1138–1140.

⁴⁴ For example, the high priests were appointed by Rome, and the group did not have the power to try capital cases under the Roman provincial rulers (Philo, *Legat.* 306–308; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.2; the improper execution of James the brother of Jesus by Ananus the high priest, 20.199–203; *B.J.* 2.117; 6.126; *Meg. Ta'an.* 6, 13–15; *y. Sanh.* 18a, 42–43; *b. Sanh.* 41a; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 8b; cf. discussion in Schnabel in Chapman and Schnabel 2015, 15–31).

⁴⁵ Cf. the stoning of Stephen, Acts 6:12–15; 7:54–58; the death penalty for a foreigner entering the inner temple courts, CHIP I/1 2; the case of the adulterous woman, Jn 7:53–8:11; cf. Chapman and Schnabel 2015, 16–18.

⁴⁶ Cf. for evidence of a wide jurisdiction: the Sanhedrin's trial of Herod for crimes in Galilee, Josephus, *A.J.* 14.167–181; Josephus' appeal to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem in *Vita* 62; possibly shown by the gathering of taxes, *B.J.* 2.405; the declaration of fasts for regions beyond Jerusalem, *m. Ta'an.* 3:6; Schwartz 1990, 62–64; Schnabel 2006, 104; Twelftree 2013, 839.

⁴⁷ Cf., e.g. their desire to arrest Jesus and men sent from them, Matt 21:45; 26:47; Luke 22:52.

The following is a survey of their explicit appearances in Matthew: many came for the baptism of John, and were caustically engaged by him (with some of the Pharisees, 3:7); they tested Jesus by asking for a sign from heaven (with the Pharisees, 16:1); Jesus warns his disciples about their teaching (and that of the Pharisees, 16:6, 11–12); they question Jesus in the temple precincts about the resurrection (22:23, and are ultimately silenced by Jesus, 22:34).

The group designated by Σαδδουκαῖοι overlaps significantly (but not exclusively) with that of the chief priests and elders.⁴⁸ Several ancient sources indicate that Sadducees were predominately aristocratic figures tied to the priestly elite.⁴⁹ The priesthood and the temple were central to the Sadducees, as illustrated, e.g., in their strict halakhah regarding cultic purity.⁵⁰ The Sadducees rejected the normativity of oral tradition acknowledged by the Pharisees, and thus, in their view, sought to follow the text of the Torah more closely (Josephus, *A.J.* 13.294–297; 18.16), though they certainly had a set of interpretive traditions and beliefs of their own.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Though cf. Nodet 2011, 1499–1500 who disputes the evidence of Acts 5:17 and Ananus of Josephus, *A.J.* 13.298 as not applicable generally (and in the case of Acts 5:17, questionable, disputing the existence of the Sanhedrin during this period, thus making Acts anachronistic).

⁴⁹ Cf. Josephus' witness that the Sadducees consisted of the few, the rich, not the general populace, *A.J.* 13.298; 18.17; the linkage of the Sadducees with the high priests and those with him in Acts 5:17; 4:1; Sadducees in the Sanhedrin, 23:6–7; the record of Ananus, a Sadducean high priest, *A.J.* 20.199–200; Stemberger 2010, 1180–1181; Strauss 2013, 823–825; Deines 2008b, 858; Fletcher-Louis 2013, 701; Schnabel 2006, 105; Mason 1995, 176.

⁵⁰ E.g., that a person who had been immersed for purification during the day could not participate in the purifying ritual of the red heifer (cf. Num 19) before the sun set and the day was ended (this restriction also applies to impurity apart from the red heifer ritual), as opposed to a more open, Pharisaic perspective which would allow participation after immersion before the sun had set; cf. Schiffman 1994, 285–299; Stemberger 2010, 1181.

⁵¹ Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.297–298; the lack of belief in the resurrection, Josephus, *A.J.* 18.16; Mark 12:18–27 and par.; Acts 23:6–8; the power of fate, Josephus, *B.J.* 2.164–166; *A.J.* 13.173; Deines 2008b, 859; Stemberger 2010, 1180–1181; Mason 1995, 162–163; cf. Nodet 2011, 1510, who argues that the Sadducees were a reform movement in response to the traditions of the Pharisees.

2.2.5 Pharisees

The name “Pharisees” characterizes a Jewish party⁵² defined by a common commitment to particular oral traditions regarding Torah,⁵³ who sought to sanctify the nation by helping every person of Israel know and keep Torah.⁵⁴

In addition to the survey of the Pharisees and their connections with the other groups noted above (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11–12; 21:45; 22:15–22, 34, 41; 27:62), the following is a brief survey of their appearances in Matthew: Jesus teaches that one’s righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20); they question why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (9:11); John’s disciples report that the Pharisees fast in distinction to Jesus’ disciples; they ascribe Jesus’ ability to cast out demons to the ruler of demons (9:34; cf. 12:24); they confront Jesus about his disciples’ illegitimate picking and eating of grain on the Sabbath (9:2); they took counsel together to destroy Jesus after he healed a man’s hand on the Sabbath (9:9–14); they question Jesus why his disciples don’t follow the traditional procedure to wash their hands before they eat (15:1–2); his disciples question whether Jesus understands how shocking his statements regarding purity and defilement were to the Pharisees (15:12); they test Jesus by questioning concerning the lawfulness of divorce (19:3f.); they are castigated and judged, along with the scribes, by Jesus regarding their behavior (23:2, 13–29).

The Pharisees are described in ancient sources (particularly by Josephus) in contrast to the Sadducees, chief priests, and other religious elite. The Pharisees were reported as having a majority of popular support for their teaching,⁵⁵ which was reputed to be precise and exact (Josephus, *B.J.* 1.110; 2.162; *A.J.* 17.41; *Vita* 191; Acts 22:3;

⁵² There were likely a variety of groups within this general set, as possibly reflected in the disputes of Hillel and Shammai, *b. Sanh.* 88b, Le Donne 2011, 204.

⁵³ Cf. Nodet 2011, who cites *m. Sanh.* 11.3, which states that it is more serious to teach contrary to the traditions of the scribes than the written law.

⁵⁴ For this basic definition I draw from Deines 2010, 1062; for the Pharisaic goal of purity for the whole nation, beyond the priestly classes, cf. Himmelfarb 1997, 98.

⁵⁵ Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.288–289, 399–402; 18.15; the indirect reports of such teaching in Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; John 9:28; Matt 16:12. Luz cites for evidence of their dominance in the first century BC, 4QpNah II, 2–III.8 (Luz 2005, 3:146–147). With respect to the first century, Mason 1990, 363–381 argues for the historicity of this popular appeal (and specifically for the historicity of the assumption that scribes and Pharisees hold widespread teaching authority in Matt 23:1–2), disputing the dismissal of Josephus’ positive portrayal as mere posturing for a Roman audience, citing the negative portrayal of the Pharisees in *A.J.* 13.288–298, 400–432; 17.41–45; *Vita* 189–198; Nodet 2011, 1505–1506 argues that the Pharisees were an established group earlier than the Sadducees, based on Josephus’ narration of the Sadducees reaction to the traditions already disseminated amongst the populace by the Pharisees, *A.J.* 13.297.

26:5),⁵⁶ yet in some cases more lenient than that of the Sadducees.⁵⁷ Their halakhic commitments likely appealed to a majority of Jews, because they allowed for a greater level of participation in religious life by those who worked with their hands, e.g., they assumed that people purified themselves before coming to Jerusalem for festivals.⁵⁸ Their desire was not to replace the priesthood, or subvert them, but to involve the people as much as possible in the proper life of holy worship centered in the temple.⁵⁹ We do have limited evidence that some Pharisees were priests (Josephus, *Vita* 197),⁶⁰ and some were members of the Sanhedrin (cf. Gamaliel, Acts 5:33–34; the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:6–7).⁶¹ Scribes, too, likely were an integral part of the Pharisees, given the need for exact interpretation of the law and their roles as teachers of the people.⁶² In light of this data, one should not absolutize the contrastive characterizations of these groups in the ancient sources.⁶³ Though the Pharisees did not dominate with official political power as did the previous groups surveyed above, there is evidence for political involvement nonetheless, even if in a different mode.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Deines 2010, 1061–1063; Mason 1995, 168–170.

⁵⁷ Josephus, *A.J.* 13.297–298; those who seek easy interpretations of the Law, the *dwršy hhlkw*, may refer to Pharisaic parties condemned by the more conservative Qumran community, e.g., CD-A I, 18–21; 4Q169 frg. 3–4, I–III; Cohick 2013, 676–679; cf. the more conservative, halakhic similarities between some Qumran documents and the Sadducees regarding the *tevil yom*, Schiffman 1994.

⁵⁸ Birenboim 2011, 66–68; Deines, 2010, 1063, similarly points to the concept of a *tevil yom*, which frees one who had immersed for purification during the day to proceed as pure, rather than needing to wait until sunset.

⁵⁹ Birenboim 2011, 68. Sanders argues that the Pharisaic practice of handwashing was not emulate priestly purity, but to protect priestly food from impurity, rather than every item of their own food (Sanders 1992, 437–438).

⁶⁰ Fletcher-Louis 2013, 701.

⁶¹ Schnabel 2006, 106; Cohick 2013, 675;

⁶² Scribes and Pharisees are grouped together in Matt 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29. One need not conclude that Matthew considers all scribes and Pharisees to be identical, esp. in light of the record of scribes associated with other groups and as their own group, cf. Luz 2005, 3:147–149.

⁶³ Deines 2008b, 859.

⁶⁴ Cf. their partnership with Sadducees to appeal to Pilate for a tomb guard, 27:62–63; collusion with Herodians in 22:15–22; links with political groups and involvement under the Roman administration in Mark 3:6; 12:13; Matt 21:45; 27:62; John 7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; 18:3; Acts 5:37; 23:6–8; Josephus, *J.W.*

2.2.6 Scribes

Scribes (γραμματεῖς) in Matthew appear in various situations in connection with several groups. Matthew's gospel depicts the variety of historical functions and associations that scribes likely had in this period.

In Matthew, the appearances of the scribes with the chief priests and/or elders include: the chief priests and scribes serve together in Herod's court (2:4); Jesus expects that he will be killed by the chief priests, elders, and scribes in Jerusalem (16:21; 20:18); the chief priests and scribes confront Jesus in the temple regarding the crowd's acclamation of him as son of David (21:15); the scribes and elders gather with Caiaphas and the chief priests to interrogate Jesus (26:57); the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock the crucified Jesus together (27:41). The scribes are also grouped commonly with the Pharisees, shown the following passages: Jesus teaches that one's righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20); some scribes and Pharisees sought a sign from Jesus (12:38); Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem question Jesus why his disciples do not wash their hands (15:1–2); Jesus recognizes the teaching authority of the scribes and Pharisees (23:2), but lambasts them together for their many faults (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). At times, the scribes appear on their own, as in the following passages: Matthew describes the teaching of Jesus as having authority and astounding those who heard him, rather than that of the scribes of the people in Galilee (7:29); some scribes considered Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness as blasphemy (9:1–3); the disciples report that the scribes consider Elijah as a coming eschatological figure (17:10). Matthew also records instances in which scribes appear more positively, including: a scribe professes commitment to follow Jesus (8:19); Jesus teaches that the scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom will bring out valuable treasure (13:52); Jesus sends prophets, wise men, and scribes to the people as a witness against them (23:34).

Scribes as such did not have a particular party affiliation as with the other groups surveyed above, but functioned variously for different groups.⁶⁵ Scribes were professional writers of various kinds, including, for example:⁶⁶ village scribes, perhaps functioning as

2.411; 4.158–161; *Vita* 17–23; 189–198. Thus I conclude against the skepticism of McLaren 1991, 91–92; Luz 2005, 3:147; with Cohick 2013, 674; Deines 2010, 1061.

⁶⁵ Saldarini 2001, 241.

⁶⁶ For this summary, I depend on Schams 1998, 135–143, 321–327; Saldarini 2001, 241–276.

local administrators;⁶⁷ Diophantus, the premier scribe of King Herod;⁶⁸ a scribe of Eleazar, a *strategos* and son of the high priest Ananias;⁶⁹ independent scribes who sold their services in market places;⁷⁰ Jewish scribes in the temple as record-keepers;⁷¹ Jewish scribes renowned for their expertise in the interpretation of the Law, often located in Jerusalem;⁷² and scribes as advisors to Roman prefects concerning Egyptian affairs.⁷³ The transmission of the Old Testament and its translations into Greek presuppose the existence and function of scribes, whose roles as teachers and experts in scriptural interpretation overlapped with similar roles of priests and Pharisees as mentioned above.⁷⁴ Especially in the gospels, Jewish scribes are known as influential and authoritative interpreters of scripture, beyond the basic function of a scribe as a professional writer and/or official in Greco-Roman society.⁷⁵

2.2.7 Herodians

The Herodians, compared to the other groups examined, are enigmatic and not widely attested in other sources. The Herodians appear in the gospels as partners of the Pharisees in conspiring against Jesus in Galilee (after his healing of a man on a Sabbath, Mark 3:6)

⁶⁷ Josephus, *B.J.* 1.479. That village scribes may also have functioned as administrators is likely given the similar function of village scribes in Ptolemaic Egypt, cf. Schams 1998, 135–136; Saldarini 2001, 263.

⁶⁸ Josephus, *B.J.* 1.529.

⁶⁹ This scribe was abducted and used as a bargaining chip for prisoners of war by Sicarii (Josephus, *A.J.* 20.208–209).

⁷⁰ *Gīt* 3.1; 9.8.

⁷¹ *Sanh.* 4.3.

⁷² Aristeus, the scribe of the council of Jerusalem (Josephus, *B.J.* 5.532), the “sacred scribes” who were experienced with interpreting omens (Josephus, *B.J.* 6.291); the advisors of Herod (Matt 2:3–4); the scribe Nahum (*Pe’ah* 2.6).

⁷³ Philo, *Flacc.* 3.

⁷⁴ Saldarini 2001, 247–248, 259–260, citing the elevated status of the scribes in *Let. Aris.* 121–127

⁷⁵ Matt 7:29; 23:1–2, 5–7; Mark 1:22; 12:38–40; Luke 20:45–47; cf. the designation of scribes as νομοκοί and νομοδιδάσκαλοι, Matt 22:35; Luke 5:17; 10:25; Acts 5:34; Saldarini 2001, 266–267. One need not consider the gospels’ attestation to unified groups of scribes in opposition to Jesus as historically inaccurate, as though the gospel writers intended to communicate that all scribes were similar in every way, contra Saldarini 2001, 266.

and seeking to entrap him by asking whether one should pay taxes to the emperor in Jerusalem (Mark 3:6; 12:13; Matt 22:16). In Matt 12:15, Jesus is reported to have withdrawn in reaction to the activity of the Pharisees' conspiracy against him (who conspire with Herodians in the Markan parallel passage, Mark 3:6), possibly indicating fear of Herod and his supporters (as in the threat of Luke 13:31). Though not original, the Herodians also appear in a variant reading of Mark 8:15, in which Jesus warns of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (of the Herodians as early as p45).⁷⁶

The name Herodians (Ἡρῳδῖανοί)⁷⁷ designates generally those who were, e.g., supporters, officials, members of household, or soldiers affiliated with Herod Antipas, who may have desired to reinstate a Herodian rule over Judea as in the days of Herod the great, but at the very least supported his rule.⁷⁸ Josephus seems to refer to supporters of Herod I with the proper Greek term (τῶν Ἡρῳδείων, *B.J.* 1.319). That the Pharisees would consult with Herodians in Galilee regarding Jesus is plausible in that Herod Antipas would have jurisdiction in this area. That the Herodians would be concerned with a popular prophet's teaching⁷⁹ regarding taxation (and thus relating to Roman rule) also seems plausible in light of their vested interests in supporting Herod and thus the Roman rulers who authorized him.⁸⁰ The Herodians may have overlapped with those called Boethusians by Josephus, given that men from this family were commonly chosen as high priests during the reign of Herod I and Agrippa I (*A.J.* 19.297–298; 15.320–322;

⁷⁶ Meier 2000, 740.

⁷⁷ A Latinism from *Herodiani*, Meier 2000, 742; Bond 2006, 813.

⁷⁸ Hoehner 1972, 331–342; Jenson 2010, 109–112; Smallwood 1976, 163–164; Meier 2000.

⁷⁹ This is especially relevant in that this prophet was likely regarded widely by some as a messianic son of David, and spoke regularly about the coming kingdom of God.

⁸⁰ Meier 2000, 743; Smallwood 1973, 163–164; Hoehner 1972, 335.

17.78, 164–167, 339, 341; 18.3).⁸¹ John Meier disputes the historicity of the Pharisee’s collusion with Herodians in the temple precinct on the basis of the evidence’s position in a redactional, introductory frame, and the “neat combination” of religious and political groups against Jesus that seems artificial.⁸² However, it is not clear why this must be artificial, given the political involvement of the Pharisees generally and the threat Jesus may have posed to the status quo. Moreover, rather than serving as evidence for redactional embellishment, Meier’s further argument that the Herodians appear only marginally without further development seems to serve as evidence for the authenticity of their involvement, as Mark and Matthew clearly did not choose to develop this further.

2.3 Arguments for the Historical Plausibility of the Setting of Matt 21:33–46

In this section, I discuss the historical plausibility of the narrative setting of Jesus’ parable of the wicked tenants, i.e., as a response of Jesus to questions from the religious leadership concerning Jesus’ authority in the temple precinct. I offer arguments for the historical plausibility of this setting in general, and specifically for the historical involvement of both chief priests and Pharisees as Jesus’ respondents (cf. 21:45).

2.3.1 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants as a Response to the Question concerning Authority

Many scholars dispute the historicity of the Gospels’ controversy narratives in general. For example, Rudolph Bultmann argued that all such controversy stories were “imaginary,” due to the early church’s fabrication and/or repurposing of Jesus’ words and

⁸¹ Hoehner 1972, 339.

⁸² Meier 2000, 744–745.

events in terms of their conflicts with later groups.⁸³ Michael J. Cook follows and develops the earlier work of Paul Winter⁸⁴ in pointing to allegedly anomalous tendencies by which Mark (and thus Matthew and Luke) identified the various groups which opposed Jesus, thinking that Mark needed to construct a narrative that explained how the chief priests, scribes, and elders wound up as key players in Jesus' death in Jerusalem, first by adding in episodes recalling the scribes in Galilee, then adding further episodes of Pharisees and Herodians in Galilee.⁸⁵ Ed P. Sanders argues that the disputes over Sabbath and food purity are too suspiciously relevant to the later disputes of the early church to be authentic to Jesus, for if they were, Sanders argues, there wouldn't be a reason for the later disputes.⁸⁶ In this interpretive trajectory, the opponents of Jesus are to be understood as a unified, undifferentiated front functioning on a purely narrative level as foils for the words and actions of "Jesus," but through him, Matthew and his community.

Yet it seems more historically probable (particularly by accounting better for more of the historical data) that Matthew's presentation of Jesus' conflict with the religious establishment in Jerusalem is based on his remembrance of the realities of the historical Jesus, rather than to imagine that Matthew invented these wholesale.⁸⁷ The following arguments support the perspective of this study that one best interprets

⁸³ Bultmann 1963, 40, quoted in Keith 2014, 131, though by "imaginary" Bultmann does not mean wholesale invention, indeed he thinks it "very probable" (p. 40) that Jesus may have said things like those contained in the controversy dialogues, cf. Bultmann 1963, 49–52; for a brief survey of scholarship on this issue, see Keith 2014, 130–137; Mason 1990, 371–373.

⁸⁴ Winter 1974.

⁸⁵ Cook 2012, 62–65, 70–75, assuming, for example, that the "scribes" of Mark 2:6–10 are "Sanhedrin personnel" (75) retrojected into the narrative of the healing of the paralytic; yet it is not self-evident that "scribes" must refer to members of the Sanhedrin.

⁸⁶ Summarized in Sanders 1993, 222–223; cf. Pickup 2007, 111–112 for arguments against Sanders' view based on the idea that Jesus' disputes with various opponents do not map well onto the early church's conflicts.

⁸⁷ This view would combine the understanding that Matthew's narration and designation of Jesus' opponents has historical value with the further reality that Matthew inevitably shaped the story as he told it, as in Kingsbury 1987, 58–59.

Matthew's presentation of the temple precinct dialogues (21:23–22:46, and 21:33–46 particularly) as an historically realistic narrative.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the parable of the wicked tenants follows the scene in which leaders in the temple confront Jesus regarding his authority (Matt 21:21–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8). Arland Hultgren argues that this controversy story is a “unitary conflict story,” by which he means that the statement of Jesus contained within the story is comprehensible only in light of the particular narrative situation.⁸⁸ This is clear, according to Hultgren, from the question posed by the leaders regarding the source of authority by which Jesus did “these things,” referring most likely to the demonstrations in the temple.⁸⁹ Gam Seng Shae argues that one cannot identify the original questioners with the temple authorities, because Jesus' question in response assumes that they would have considered John's authority to be from heaven, following Bultmann;⁹⁰ yet this is not necessarily the case.⁹¹ Evans argues further that this exchange is authentic to the historical Jesus due to potential misunderstanding of Jesus' words as showing that he is in some way contingent upon John, and that this passage does not center on Christology when it could easily have done so.⁹²

As the historical setting is indispensable for the question concerning Jesus' authority, so too the parable of the wicked tenants in its Matthean form seems inseparably

⁸⁸ Hultgren 1979, 67. Hultgren classifies the payment of taxes to Caesar, the question about fasting, the healing on the Sabbath, and the sinful woman at a Pharisee's house as other unitary conflict stories (Hultgren 1979, 67–87).

⁸⁹ Hultgren argues that this would be a natural sequence of events, appeals to the similar sequence in John 2:18, and argues that the question makes most sense in light of a given action by Jesus (which is what the question concerns, “doing” these things, ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς, Matt 21:23), most likely the temple action (Hultgren 1979, 71–72).

⁹⁰ Shae 1974, 16.

⁹¹ Rather, Jesus seems to introduce John into the discussion of authority to force the hand of his interlocutors vis-à-vis the crowds; cf. Marshall 1978, 724.

⁹² Evans 2001, 198; Hultgren 1979, 72–74; cf. Bock 1996, 1583.

linked with this particular circumstance during the confrontation in the temple. The design of the parable strongly supports the understanding that it was meant as a condemnation of those who had resisted his authority and message, in that Jesus draws on Isaiah 5:1–7 to craft a story concerning tenants (the leaders) over the vineyard (Israel) who violently reject the owner’s (God’s) attempts to receive the fruit he deserves through his messengers and, climactically, through his son (Jesus). Before Jesus’ time, others linked the vineyard imagery of Isaiah 5:1–7 with imagery of the temple, supporting the plausibility of the use Jesus makes of Isaiah 5:1–7 to condemn members of the Jewish leadership in the temple precinct (e.g., 4Q500; 4Q162; 1 Enoch 89:50, 54, 56, 64–68, 73).⁹³ Jesus likely uses Ps 118:22–23 (with its reference to a stone which builders initially rejected, yet became crucially important) as a citation of scripture against his opponents who rejected him (the stone), drawing on the common use of “builders” as a designation for Jewish religious leaders.⁹⁴ The authenticity of the narrative frame thus depends in large part on the authenticity of these features of the parable, which will be discussed further in section 2.4.

Several additional factors support the historical plausibility of Matthew’s narrative of the temple precinct dialogues based on a conflict of religious authority. Jesus’ conflicts with the establishment likely arose because he claimed religious authority over against those who held established authority. Though Jesus himself was likely not a “scribal-literate”⁹⁵ teaching authority (he was known instead as a builder, τέκτων, cf. Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55; unlearned, μὴ μεμαθηκώς, John 7:15), many thought he was learned due to his public teaching (cf. the authority with which he taught, in contrast to

⁹³ Kloppenborg 2006, 93–96; Evans 1995, 397–401.

⁹⁴ Snodgrass 2008, 290, citing 1QIsa^a 54:13; CD IV, 19; VIII, 12; Acts 4:11.

⁹⁵ This word and its related concepts come from Keith 2014, 29–36.

scribes in Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). Thus conflict emerged as some of the established scribal-literate authorities attempted to challenge him on the basis of Scripture and his claims to authority.⁹⁶ By “scribal-literate” Chris Keith means both the actual educational status (ability to read and write, access to first-hand use of scriptural documents, time for study) of acknowledged religious authorities⁹⁷ to be able to function as an authority regarding Scripture and thus generally in religious life as a Jew, and the perceived status which such abilities would give through the societal roles enacted regularly in Jewish life.⁹⁸ The close relationship between religio-political authority and scribal ability is also attested in the overlapping associations of “scribes” (οἱ γραμματεῖς) and scribal activities in the various groups surveyed above.⁹⁹ Le Donne also makes the general observation that Jesus’ disputes concerning scriptural interpretation and authority are very similar to the conflict already present amongst the various groups vying for influence through public debate, and fit very naturally as representative of historical inner-Jewish contention.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Keith 2014, summarized on p. 141.

⁹⁷ I.e., within whichever particular group, whether a Pharisee, Sadducee, a village or temple scribe, a priest or Levite, etc.

⁹⁸ Keith 2014, 29–36; an example of the societal roles and their boundaries would be the public reading and interpretation of scripture in the synagogue – those who were authorities read and taught, while those who were not (manual-laborers, etc.) listened and perhaps participated in the discussion, but did not lead the proceedings (cf. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.17; Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.12–13).

⁹⁹ Cf., e.g., the celebratory description and varying religious and political functions of the elite scribe in Sir. 38:24–39:11; the common linkage of scribes with both chief priests and Pharisees in the Synoptics; the witness of Josephus to certain scribes of the temple (Josephus, *A.J.* 11.128; 12.142); Brown 1994, 1:352; Le Donne 2011, 205; Deines 2010, 1063; Fletcher-Louis 2013, 696; Thellman 2013, 840–845; Himmelfarb 1997, 102–104; cf. discussion of scribes in Second Temple period in Saldarini 2001, 241–273;

¹⁰⁰ Le Donne 2011, 203–204, drawing on proposed evidence for a first-century controversy between Dosa ben Harkinas and his Shammite brother Jonathan, whom he called the “firstborn of Satan,” y. *Yebam.* 1:6, 5e; cf. also the possible violence against Hillel in the temple related to disputed sacrificial procedures, t. *Hag.* 2.11.

In light of Jesus' provocative teaching and actions (especially the action in the temple just prior to this dispute, Matt 21:12–17) and his popular following,¹⁰¹ the religious leadership had a vested interest in publicly shaming Jesus and discrediting his claims to be a religious authority. The historical witness to the accusation at Jesus' trial that he was a seducer of the people¹⁰² is further corroboration of the seriousness of this opposition.¹⁰³ Later rabbinic discussion of such “seducers” (a *mēsît* or *madiyah*) also describes their characteristic lack of learning, naming them a common person, or *hediyôt* (m. Sanh. 7:10; y. Sanh. 25c,74–25d,10).¹⁰⁴

One may also note numerous similarities between Jesus' criticism of the temple-based religious establishment and the criticism leveled by other groups predating Jesus' time.¹⁰⁵ That Jesus was charged with blasphemy could have been based in part on his criticism of the religious leadership, an offense deserving death.¹⁰⁶ In the *Psalms of Solomon*, likely written in the late 60s BC, the conquest and desecration of the temple by Pompey is cast as a result of the priesthood's defiling of the temple (e.g., 1:8; 2:3) via prostitution and sexual deviancy (ἐν φυρμῷ ἀναμείξεως, 2:13, cf. 2:11–13; 8:9–13, 21–22;).¹⁰⁷ In *Ps. Sol.* 4, the author lambasts one who sits in the council of the pious¹⁰⁸ as provoking God with his sins, having a heart far removed from God, and being

¹⁰¹ E.g., at Jesus' entry the crowds welcome him (21:1–11); they consider him to be a prophet (21:46); the religious leadership question Jesus directly about his failure to refuse the crowd's celebratory, shouted appellation “son of David” after his actions in the temple, 21:15–16.

¹⁰² Matt 27:62–63; Luke 23:1–2, 5; John 7:12; 7:45–49; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.63; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 69.7)

¹⁰³ See discussion by Schnabel in Chapman and Schnabel 2014, 130–134.

¹⁰⁴ See discussion by Schnabel in Chapman and Schnabel 2014, 67–70, 76–78.

¹⁰⁵ For an excellent survey of a variety of Jewish views toward the temple in the second temple period preceding Jesus, see Holmén 2014, 183–202.

¹⁰⁶ As in the case of Eleazar's slanderous comments against Hyrcanus the high priest, Josephus, *A.J.* 13.293–296, based on Exod 22:28; cf. *C. Ap.* 2.194; see discussion by Schnabel in Chapman and Schnabel 2014, 127–130.

¹⁰⁷ Perrin 2010, 21–29.

¹⁰⁸ συ, βέβηλε, καθήσαι ἐν συνεδρίῳ ὁσίων, *Ps. Sol.* 4:1, probably referring to the high priest and perhaps other elite more generally.

hypocritically severe in judgment towards others while being a sinner himself (4:1–28).¹⁰⁹ The author petitions God for this person’s utter destruction and removal from the earth (4:6, 16–22). Theft from the temple treasury also appears as an accusation of the priests (8:11).¹¹⁰ Petition of God for a messianic figure who will both purge Jerusalem from its sinful rulers (and thus cleanse his temple) and purify God’s people appears as well (17:22–29, 33, 36).¹¹¹ If the *Assumption of Moses* is to be dated to the early first century AD,¹¹² its seventh chapter describes the priesthood of the same period, who present themselves as righteous but are in fact godless (7:3, 7, 9–10), who are deceitful and love to serve themselves (7:4, 7–8), who take resources from and oppress the poor (7:6–7).¹¹³ Similarly, the Qumran peshar on Habbakuk likely speaks of a Hasmonean high priest (possibly Hyrcanus) as a “wicked priest” (*hkwhn hrš’*) who has defiled the sanctuary (XII, 8–9), and has become rich yet has robbed the poor (VIII, 8–12; IX, 5; X, 1; XII, 10).¹¹⁴ So too, the Damascus Document criticizes the “princes of Judah” (*šry yhw dh*), the Jerusalem religious elite, for their sexual sin, enmity toward one another, and corruption in wealth (CD VIII, 3–12; criticism of the priesthood more directly in V, 6–8; IV, 17–18).¹¹⁵ 4QMMT functions as a letter to a Hasmonean high priest to return to the halakhah more closely aligned with later “Sadducean” sensibilities, including the adoption of the solar calendar, and the rejection of Gentile sacrifices (e.g., 4Q394, frags. 3–7, I).¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Perrin 2010, 24–25.

¹¹⁰ Perrin 2010, 24–25.

¹¹¹ Perrin 2010, 26–27; Chanikuzhy 2012, 22–23.

¹¹² Particularly in light of probable references to Herod the Great and his sons in *As. Mos.* 6:1–7; cf. Evans 1995, 340.

¹¹³ Evans 1995, 340–341.

¹¹⁴ Cf. similarly 4QpNah I, 11; Evans 1995, 337; Perrin 2010, 30–31. Though this material reflects upon an earlier period, those in the Qumran community in the first-century could likely have also understood its meaning to refer to the current high priest as well, as argued in Evans 1995, 338.

¹¹⁵ Chanikuzhy 2012, 29.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Schiffman 2010, 112–122; Eshel 1996, 53–65; Chanikuzhy 2012, 28–29.

Regarding Josephus and Philo, Craig Evans argues from the apparent lack of leadership by Caiaphas and other priestly elite against Pilate's religiously offensive actions¹¹⁷ that the priestly elite were likely well-disposed to the Roman rulers in contrast to the general populace, who may have viewed the priestly elite with distrust due to their collaboration with the Romans (in keeping with the general picture sketched above of the Sadducees lack of appeal to the general public).¹¹⁸

2.3.2 The Pairing of Pharisees and Chief Priests

One further difficulty relevant for this study regards the historicity of Matthew's depiction of Jesus' addressees in Matt 21:45. Given the contrastive presentation of Pharisees and Sadducees in other sources, some scholars dispute the pairing of Sadducees and Pharisees in Matthew's gospel as historically improbable, and some consider that the different groups identified serve only polemical purposes and have no historical value.¹¹⁹ Some scholars argue particularly that "Pharisees" here in Matt 21:45 is a Matthean addition driven by the desire to heighten the conflict between Jesus and the "Pharisees"

¹¹⁷ Instead, the general populace reacts against the introduction of statues of Tiberius into Jerusalem, Josephus, *A.J.* 18.55–59; cf. the illicit use of sacred treasury funds to build an aqueduct, Josephus, *A.J.* 18.60–62; the installation of golden shields in the palace of Herod, Philo, *Legat.* 299–305)

¹¹⁸ Evans 1995, 338–340. For corroboration of Evans' view with respect to *A.J.* 18.60–62, see McLaren 1991, 85–88. A key problem with this argument, however, is that it is largely from silence, based on the lack of reference to Caiaphas or the priestly elite in these instances.

¹¹⁹ E.g., Nodet 2011, 1513–1514, who thinks Matthew is "at least unaware" of the distinction between the two parties; Saldarini 2001, 157, though see his admission that the two could theoretically unite against a common enemy, 167. On p. 158, Saldarini also refers to the work of Sjef van Tilborg 1972, as presenting the general argument that Matthew's designations of various groups serve only his redactional agenda, and/or the polemical agenda of his sources, and do not present accurate historical reality. Van Tilborg states at the outset of his study, "The many names [Matthew] eventually gives the Jewish leaders are not meant as further historical information. He does not want to introduce a distinction between Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, high priests, and elders. In his eyes they are all equally representatives of the one Israel" (Van Tilborg 1972, 1, cf. the overview of 1–6). See the discussion of the opponents of Jesus throughout Matthew's gospel in Repschinski 2000, 322–327, in which Repschinski argues that Matthew does show an interest in distinguishing the groups in opposition to Jesus.

(cf. Matt 23:1–39)¹²⁰ because of the Matthean community’s conflict with early rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the temple.¹²¹

This issue has particular bearing on this study, for if the Sadducees and Pharisees are fictionally linked in Matthew’s narrative, the same may be said for the pairing of the chief priests and Pharisees of 21:45 (and the elders of the people from 21:23), whom Matthew records as responding together to Jesus’ statement in 21:43. If the “chief priests and Pharisees” here are merely a fictional narrative foil, this lessens the relevance of historical information concerning the chief priests and Pharisees for interpreting Matt 21:43. The following data and arguments suggest that Matthew’s portrayal is not historically improbable, as the two groups could be united in a common cause against Jesus, a (potentially) mutually beneficial task:¹²² (a) according to Josephus, the Pharisees, chief priests, and other leaders gathered to determine how to react to the assault on Masada and the high priest Eleazar’s refusal to accept sacrifices for any foreigner, including the emperor, events Josephus presents as precipitating the war with Rome (*B.J.* 2.408–411; cf. *Vita* 17–23);¹²³ (b) Simon, a leading Pharisee, apparently persuaded the high priests and their allies to eject Josephus himself from his position (*Vita* 189–198);

¹²⁰ Matthew describes Jesus’ addressees as the chief priests and Pharisees, in contrast to Mark’s implied chief priests, scribes, and elders (introduced in Mark 11:27, recalled by an ambiguous “they” in Mark 12:12) and the scribes and chief priests as the reactive addressees in Luke 20:19. In addition to adding the Pharisees at Matt 21:45, Matthew’s identification of the group who challenges Jesus’ authority (Matt 21:23–27) omits the “scribes” of Mark 11:27 and Luke 20:1. I do not dispute that Matthew’s narrative is different in specifying “Pharisees,” but I do dispute the claim that this report is historically improbable or completely at odds with the other gospels.

¹²¹ E.g., Nodet 2011, 1515–1516 who thinks that the references to Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew refer particularly to the adversaries of the later disciples of Jesus. Cf. discussion of scholars in Saldarini 2001, 158.

¹²² See the further discussion in von Wahlde 1996; cf. Saldarini’s suggestion that the pairing may simply witness to the two groups sharing a common interest in “how Judaism was lived and might unite against a new faction centered around Jesus,” Saldarini 2001, 167; for approval of this linkage as plausible, cf. Nolland 2005, 880–881.

¹²³ Admittedly, this narrative describes a later period, but it doesn’t seem that this fact would necessarily preclude the passage from offering relevant support.

(c) beyond the Synoptics, the Gospel of John also witnesses to the collaboration of the chief priests and Pharisees (John 7:45–52; 11:47, 57; 18:3);¹²⁴ (d) even if there was no reference to the Pharisees, they were not anti-temple establishment, but supported it in their teaching despite their differences with the Sadducees, and would thus be implicated in any criticism of the temple leadership, and indirectly implicated by the narrative's inclusion of their opposition to Jesus later in 22:15, 34.¹²⁵

The preceding discussion has sought to establish Matthew's discursive frame for the statement of Jesus in Matt 21:43 historically. I have argued that Matthew's narrative should be taken seriously as a historical narrative, rather than being understood as an invention by Matthew. The earliest Christian audiences of Matthew 21:43 and its surrounding dispute narrative would find material applicable to contemporary debates and missionary activity towards Jews of their day (among several other possible uses). However, the contention of this study is that such applicability does not function as an argument against this narrative's historical realism. Of course, a crucial question is whether the actual words spoken by Jesus in the parable of the wicked tenants and afterwards (esp. Matt 21:43, given they only appear in Matthew) are authentic. The next section explores this question with regard to both Matt 21:43 and the parable as a whole.

2.4 Matthew 21:43 in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants

The parable of the wicked tenants has been interpreted in three basic trajectories: (1) as a complete allegory with little realistic elements (whether originating from Jesus or created

¹²⁴ von Wahlde 1996, 514–515; Deines 2008b, 859; if the collaboration of the Pharisees and chief priests in the death of Jesus is not also dismissed on similar grounds, this would again provide evidence for their union in Matthew's controversy narrative.

¹²⁵ As opposed to, for example, the complete rejection of the Jerusalem temple establishment represented in some of the Dead Sea scrolls.

by the early church), (2) as a realistic fiction with some allegorical references to the discursive situation of the historical Jesus, and (3) a realistic fiction without allegorical references, often based on a reconstructed original disconnected from its versions in the synoptic Gospels.¹²⁶ After his extensive secondary literature review, John S. Kloppenborg helpfully notes four key issues in the interpretation of the parable: the positive or negative status of the master of the vineyard (and thus whether the allusion to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5 is original or not); the relationship of *Gos. Thom.* 65 to the other versions of the parable; the overall tradition history of the parable; and the verisimilitude (or lack thereof) of the parable.¹²⁷

In this section, I argue that the parable of the wicked tenants originates with the historical Jesus, and has elements that indirectly refer to the discursive situation of Jesus' dialogical conflicts in the temple precincts (much like the parable of the two sons in Luke 15:11–32 functions as a response to the Pharisees' and scribes' questioning of Jesus' association with sinners, Luke 15:1–2).¹²⁸ In keeping with the Matthean parable trilogy (21:28–22:14), including the parable of the two sons preceding and the parable of the wedding feast following, this parable functions primarily to bring judgment on Jesus' direct addressees, the leadership groups who have challenged his authority in the temple.¹²⁹ Because I argue that the allegorical elements of this parable were original to Jesus and decisive for its meaning, I do not separately discuss the realism of the parable's particular details. I agree with the contention of, e.g., Hengel and Snodgrass that this

¹²⁶ See the superb discussion of interpretation in Kloppenborg 2006, 50–51, 53–67, 71–103, 106–141; for a shorter overview, see Snodgrass 2008, 284–286.

¹²⁷ Kloppenborg 2006, 142–148.

¹²⁸ Thus Snodgrass labels this type of parable a “double indirect narrative parable,” referring to the way Jesus speaks about the leaders and their relationship to God, Israel, and himself by speaking about different subjects (tenants) in a different setting (over a vineyard; Snodgrass 2008, 276).

¹²⁹ Martens 2000, 152–154; Olmstead 2003, 128–130; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 282–283.

parable is realistically representative of ancient absentee landlords and tenant farming, such that Jesus' first-century audience could understand it as a coherent story in its own right, in addition to understanding it as an indirect condemnation of Jesus' opponents.¹³⁰

In the argumentation that follows, I do not assume a distinction between parable and allegory in my analysis of the wicked tenants, nor do I assume that a parable cannot also refer externally, or that any such features must be secondary and inauthentic to the historical Jesus.¹³¹ Due to the complexity of the issues and vast amount of secondary literature, the following sections present only a cursory overview of the historical arguments related to this parable. These sections function primarily to further describe in more detail the interpretive framework used in the exegesis of Matt 21:43 following in chapter 3.

2.4.1 The Tradition History and Authenticity of the Parable

Scholars have debated the tradition history of the parable of the wicked tenants extensively.¹³² Most relevant for this study is the question whether Matthew's version of the parable is so burdened with secondary accretions that it cannot plausibly represent the voice of the historical Jesus. Thus, in this section, I assume that tradition history and authenticity to the historical Jesus are linked. If it can be shown that Matthew's version is so late in the tradition history of the parable that the original form has been obscured or

¹³⁰ See discussion in Hengel 1968; Snodgrass 1983, 31–40.

¹³¹ For discussion of these issues and argumentation, cf. Snodgrass 2008, 15–17; Orchard 1976, 347–349. The concept that allegorical aspects to Jesus' parables are secondary, and thus inauthentic to the historical Jesus who only told parables, begins with Adolf Jülicher's seminal study of Jesus' parables in 1888–1889. For others who similarly dismiss the distinction between parable and allegory, see Wright 1996, 178–181; Tuckett 2014b, 411–412; cf. especially the cogent argumentation in Gathercole 2012, 134–136 regarding allegory in the synoptic versions of the parable as it relates to their connection to the version in *Gos. Thom.* 65.

¹³² For this section, I draw upon the following secondary sources and their review of the literature: Robinson 1975, 443–461; Snodgrass 1983, 41–71; Snodgrass 1998, 193–195; Kloppenborg 2006, 106–277; Koester, 1983, 195–203; Orchard 1976, 346–352.

even radically altered, then (among other implications) Matthew's saying of Jesus in 21:43 also has little connection to the historical Jesus' conflict with authorities in the temple precinct. The parable and the saying should, then, be interpreted purely in relation to the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew's community, however conceived.

This study argues that Matthew's version, regardless of the final composition date of Matthew relative to Mark and Luke, does have early features of the parable in the synoptic tradition. The most prominent of such features include: Matthew's simple designation of υἱός for the owner's son in Matt 21:37, in contrast to the more developed "one," and "beloved" son in Mark 12:6 (...ἔτι ἓνα εἶχεν υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν), and the beloved son of Luke 20:13 (...πέμψω τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν);¹³³ Matthew's story has only two groups of servants before the sending of the son, in contrast to three in Luke and more in Mark.¹³⁴ The agreement of Matthew and Luke over against Mark also perhaps signals (among other possibilities) that these sources drew from an earlier tradition independent from Mark (cf. the sequence of the ejection of the son outside the vineyard followed by his killing in Matt 21:39; Luke 20:15; the response to Jesus' question by the audience, though different, in Matt 21:41; Luke 20:16; the addition of the second stone saying, if it is to be included in Matthew's text, Matt 21:44; Luke 20:18).¹³⁵

¹³³ Noticed also in Robinson, 1975, 447, 455–456; Meier's dismissal of the significance of this omission as part of Matthew's program of abbreviation from Mark is unconvincing, Meier 2012, 133, as is the argument from the desire for parallel formulation in Matthew ("his servants...his servants...his son...") by Trilling, Davies and Allison, cf. discussion in Kloppenborg 2006, 183–184.

¹³⁴ Cf. Snodgrass 1983, 52–70 for discussion.

¹³⁵ Snodgrass 1983, 56, 60–61. Some scholars see in Matthew and Luke's placement of the son's death outside the vineyard an allegorical alignment with the crucifixion of Jesus outside Jerusalem (cf., e.g., Dodd 1961, 101; Jeremias 1963, 73). Peter Oppong-Kumi argues that such a reading breaks the imagery of the parable, for the vineyard symbolizes God's people Israel throughout, not Jerusalem (Oppong-Kumi 2013, 275). Snodgrass further explains this difference by positing that Matthew and Luke's sequence reflects a concern to avoid the potential ritual contamination upon the vineyard incurred from killing the son inside (citing 1 Kgs 21:24; Luke 4:29; Acts 7:58; but also the possible exceptions of John 8:59; Acts 14:19; supported by Kloppenborg 2006, 185 as well); in contrast, Mark reverses the sequence to heighten the shameful disgrace of the son, whose corpse was left unburied. Snodgrass also argues that Matthew and

However, features of the parable in Matthew seem clearly secondary to the original parable to some interpreters, including: the allusion to Isaiah 5 (also in Mark 12:1, though muted in Luke 20:9, absent in *Gos. Thom.* 65); the question of Jesus to his audience and their answer; Matthew's further description of the stoning and killing of the two waves of multiple servants, often taken as a heightened allegory representing the prophets; the citation of Ps 118:22–23 (also in Mark 12:10–11, while Luke quotes 118:22 only, Luke 20:17); the full saying of Matt 21:43 (and relatedly, the expanded description of the other tenants who produce fruit in the proper time in 21:41);¹³⁶ and the textually questionable scriptural citation in Matt 21:44 (included in Luke 20:18).¹³⁷ In what follows, I discuss in detail the two most important issues, the use of Isaiah 5 and Ps 118, leaving aside the particular question of the authenticity of Matt 21:43 to its own section.

The use of Isaiah 5 in the parable of the wicked tenants is central to its interpretation.¹³⁸ John Kloppenborg disputes that the allusions to Isaiah 5 in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are original to the parable by arguing that the text cited in the gospels (particularly Mark and Matthew) is thoroughly Septuagintal;¹³⁹ the Septuagintal version of Isaiah 5:1–7 reconceives the problem of the vineyard as poor tenants rather than poor vines, thus distinguishing the vineyard from its caretakers; the criticism of the tenants in the synoptic parables is likely derived from this Septuagintal emphasis; the language Jesus spoke was Hebrew and/or Aramaic, and he thus would not have quoted from the

Luke do not explicitly mention that Jesus' crucifixion was outside the city, despite what others have seen to be implications of such in Matt 27:32 or Luke 4:29. Therefore, Matthew and Luke would not have implied this in the parable.

¹³⁶ Kloppenborg 2006, 53–56, 188–191; cf. Snodgrass, 56–71.

¹³⁷ Jeremias 1963, 72; Robinson 1975, 446; Kloppenborg 2006, 181–182, cf. 177–188; Snodgrass 1983, 45–71; Culpepper 1999, 150–153.

¹³⁸ E.g., Kloppenborg 2006, 105, who describes it as “the key issue on which the interpretation of the parable of the Tenants hinges.”

¹³⁹ However, Matthew's allusive verbs describing the owner's preparation of the vineyard shares the third person plural verbs of MT Isaiah 5:1–2 over against LXX Isaiah 5:1–2; cf. Evans 2003, 106–107.

Septuagint or adopted its different emphasis, but he would have quoted rather from the Hebrew, with its retained emphasis on the poor production of the vineyard itself;¹⁴⁰ and the attempts to find a parallel to the historical Jesus' use of the Isaiah 5 parable in the context of a polemic against the temple elite are unsuccessful (and thus it is unlikely that Jesus could have used such a citation of Isaiah 5 and have been understood successfully by his audience).¹⁴¹

The problems with these arguments are threefold. First, Kloppenborg's evidence for a Septuagintal re-conception of the MT Isaiah parable is that the LXX version records that the planted vine produced thorns (ἐποίησεν δὲ ἀκάνθας, LXX Isa 5:2) rather than bad grapes (*wayya'as bē'ušîm*, MT Isa 5:2).¹⁴² In Kloppenborg's view, the production of thorns is evidence not of a poor vine but poor horticultural care in the vineyard (and even failed care by a tenant class, citing other similarities to Ptolemaic agricultural vocabulary in the LXX version of the parable). For corroboration of the OT theme that thorns signal neglect, Kloppenborg cites Isa 5:6; 7:23–25; 32:13.¹⁴³ Kloppenborg summarizes: "While the MT repeats the term 'vineyard' ..., the complaint is about the vine itself, which produced the stinking fruit. For the LXX, by contrast, the problem is that the *vineyard* yielded thorns instead of grapes."¹⁴⁴ Despite Kloppenborg's assertions, however, it seems clear that the Septuagint does in fact state that the vine produced thorns, rather than the vineyard as a whole. The LXX version follows the sequence of the MT (even if the person of the main verbs differs: ἐφύτευσα and ἔμεινα, cf. MT Isa 5:2) in stating: "I planted a vine of Sorech..." (ἐφύτευσα ἄμπελον σωρηχ..., LXX Isa 5:2), followed by

¹⁴⁰ Kloppenborg 2006, 149–172.

¹⁴¹ Kloppenborg 2006, 88–96; 99–103.

¹⁴² Kloppenborg 2006, 163–164.

¹⁴³ Kloppenborg 2006, 163–164.

¹⁴⁴ Kloppenborg 2006, 163.

the coordinate clauses, “and I waited for it to produce grapes, but it grew thorns” (ἔμεινα τοῦ ποιῆσαι σταφυλήν, ἐποίησεν δὲ ἀκάνθας, LXX Isa 5:2). That somehow the vineyard (ἀμπελῶν) of LXX Isa 5:1 is now the subject of the verb ἐποίησεν in LXX Isa 5:2, rather than the nearer ἄμπελον σωρηχ just planted seems farfetched.¹⁴⁵ It is also not clear why a vine producing thorns must lead to the inference that its caretakers have not weeded the land and are solely to blame. Perhaps a less realistic but simpler understanding is in order, that the vine produced a fruit radically, unnaturally different from what was to be expected (an interpretation paralleled in the explanation of LXX/MT Isa 5:7, in which God expected justice and righteousness from Israel and Judah, but they produced the opposite, lawlessness and cries of distress). It does not seem that the Septuagintal shift from bad grapes to thorns can carry the weight Kloppenborg places upon it.

Second, suppose one grants that the LXX version of Isaiah 5:1–7 did in fact shift the focus of Isaiah’s parable from the vineyard to the tenants. For Kloppenborg’s argument to work, one must also assume that Mark and Matthew’s Septuagintal citation of the introductory verses of Isaiah 5 shows that they also inherited the Septuagint’s understanding of a later verse rather than that of the MT, even though they did not cite this particular Septuagintal key verse (LXX Isa 5:2, in which the key reference to thorns occurs). Kloppenborg unrealistically assumes that Mark and Matthew’s Septuagintal citation somehow excludes the rest of MT Isa 5:1–7 entirely from view, eliminating it

¹⁴⁵ Moreover, if it is true that the meaning of thorns in Isa 5:2 implies negligence and abandonment already, this seems to make the foreseen, future production of thorns due to it being desolate in 5:6 redundant and anticlimactic.

from influencing any of the synoptic versions: "...there is no contact between the MT's version of the story and Mark."¹⁴⁶

Third, Kloppenborg's arguments against the plausibility of Jesus using Isaiah 5 successfully in an early first-century context as a criticism of leadership do not convince, despite their other clarifications. Kloppenborg seems to contend rightly that prior to Targum Jonathan's interpretation of Isaiah 5:1–7 in terms of a polemic directed against those to whom the temple and its altar were given,¹⁴⁷ there is no extant, precise parallel to Jesus' polemical use of Isaiah 5 against the religious establishment in Jerusalem (though there was certainly a preceding tradition of linking Isaiah 5's imagery with temple architecture, particularly in 4Q500).¹⁴⁸ Kloppenborg questions the probability of Chilton's and Evans' conception that Jesus' auditors would have had knowledge of a precursor to *Tg. Isa. 5:1–7*, and would have understood him on this basis, given the targum's later date.¹⁴⁹ Yet, one does not need to posit a precise knowledge of a particular targum, *Tg. Isa. 5:1–7*, to make plausible Jesus' successful adaptation of MT Isaiah 5:1–7 in the parable of the wicked tenants. Isaiah 5 is already a polemic against the people of Israel and Judah for a failure to produce what God expected, justice and righteousness. Kloppenborg seems to think that only in *Tg. Isa. 5:1–7* is "Isaiah's judgment oracle

¹⁴⁶ Kloppenborg 2006, 167; cf. the argument that the MT emphases remain in Mark's version, and thus Matthew's version, in Evans 2003.

¹⁴⁷ I.e., allegorizing the tower and the vat of MT Isa 5, *Tg. Isa. 5:2*, while maintaining the same general polemic against the house of Israel, men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

¹⁴⁸ Kloppenborg 2006, 93–96; possibilities of a precise parallel surveyed but denied by Kloppenborg include 4Q162; 4Q500; *t. Sukk.* 3:15, cf. pp. 88–92; cf. Evans 1995, 397–401.

¹⁴⁹ Kloppenborg 2006, 100–101, discussing Chilton 1984, 111–114. Yet, Chilton recognizes that Jesus' use of common themes to criticize the temple authorities is new and unprecedented; he argues that the earlier traditions of associating the temple with the Isaiah 5 imagery would have assisted his adaptation (Chilton 1984, 115). Evans 1995, 397–401 does not discuss at length whether and to what extent *Tg. Isa. 5:1–7* represents early first-century AD interpretive tradition among the religious establishment of Jerusalem, only citing, e.g., *1 Enoch* 89, with its identification of the temple as a tower, for support that the understanding of the targum was likely current in the first-century.

converted into a (retrospective) polemic against the people and their leaders.”¹⁵⁰ Yet MT Isaiah 5:1–7 *already was* a “polemic against the people and their leaders,”¹⁵¹ and could have been understood as such by a first-century audience. Thus, one does not need to demonstrate the widespread and early knowledge of a particular targum tradition to have a probable basis for Jesus’ successful adaptation of Isaiah 5:1–7, given Jesus’ situation in the temple precinct and his addressees (for the historicity of which I have argued above).¹⁵² This is the case even in light of the Septuagintal character of the citations, which could have shifted to the LXX in the transmission of the tradition.¹⁵³

Rather, the story of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1–7 is properly understood as a juridical parable, which provokes its hearers to condemning themselves with its rhetorical questioning of the audience (MT Isa 5:4–5; cf. Matt 18:23–25; 21:28–35; Luke 7:36–50; 10:29–37; 2 Sam 12:1–7).¹⁵⁴ The juridical, polemical nature of Isaiah 5 seems to fit the synoptic situation of Mark, Matthew, and Luke exceedingly well, given the parable of the wicked tenants’ condemnation of Jesus’ addressees (in Matthew, the Pharisees in addition to the chief priests, scribes, and elders). This is particularly so for Matthew, whose version alone has his opponents ironically condemn themselves in their answer to his question (Matt 21:41). In light of a similar structure for other Jewish parables (e.g., 2

¹⁵⁰ Kloppenborg 2006, 96.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Evans 1995, 394–396.

¹⁵² Note Meier’s confidence in this understanding, though here commenting on the persistently allusive character even of the *Gos. Thom.* 65 version of the parable, without its explicit mention of Isaiah 5: “No Jewish-Palestinian audience of Jesus’ time, listening to a well-known prophet and teacher as he addressed the religious leaders in the Jerusalem temple, could hardly miss the scriptural allusions inherent in symbols like the vineyard, the owner of the vineyard sending his servants to make claims on those working in the vineyard, and the rejection of those servants by the workers. One would have to be ignorant of individual scriptural texts but also of the master narrative governing the Jewish scriptures to miss the references” (Meier 2012, 142); cf. also the detailed argumentation for the parable’s Jewishness based on several targumic and OT witnesses in de Moor 1998.

¹⁵³ Snodgrass 2008, 287.

¹⁵⁴ Evans 1995, 395–396.

Sam 12:1–7), Matthew’s unique structure increases its historical plausibility and authenticity.¹⁵⁵

Like the use of Isaiah 5, so too the citation of Ps 118:22–23 is disputed as a secondary addition to the parable. In light of the psalm’s switch from agricultural to architectural imagery, the alleged, disruptive shift in this citation to the vindication of the dead son (perhaps referring to the resurrection, and witnessing an allegedly later, christological importation), and the psalm’s later christological use in Acts 4:11 and 1 Pet 2:7, scholars consider this quotation as a later, Christian, interpretive addition that does not reflect the historical Jesus.¹⁵⁶ With regard to the shift in imagery, however, this seems already present in MT Isaiah 5:7, with its identification of the vineyard of the Lord as the house of Israel.¹⁵⁷ Evans, Snodgrass and others argue for authenticity by pointing out that the shift from discussing a son in the parable, to a stone in the citation, is based on a Hebrew word play between two words, “stone” (*’bn*) and “son” (*bn*).¹⁵⁸ Thus the shift would not have distorted the flow of the parable. Snodgrass also argues that the citation links the tenants with the “builders” of Ps 118:22, noting that it was a frequent designation of the Jewish religious leadership.¹⁵⁹ Evans appeals to the later targum of Psalm 118, which translates the Hebrew “stone” (*’bn*) in MT 118:22 as “son” (Aramaic,

¹⁵⁵ Snodgrass 1983, 96, citing the work of Uriel Simon, 1967, who defines a juridical parable as “a realistic story about a violation of the law, related to someone who had committed a similar offence with the purpose of leading the unsuspecting hearer to pass judgment on himself.”

¹⁵⁶ See bibliography and discussion in Snodgrass 1983, 62–65; 1998, 203; Kloppenborg 2006, 85–86, 236–241.

¹⁵⁷ Snodgrass 2008, 683, n. 140.

¹⁵⁸ Snodgrass 1983, 113–118; Wright 1996, 501; Evans 1995, 402–404. Kloppenborg disputes this wordplay as only working in Hebrew (for the Aramaic word for son is *bar*, not *ben*), and not as widespread as the play between “sons” and “builders” (Kloppenborg 2006, 85–86). Though the targum of Ps 118 is late in comparison to the Gospel texts, I remain convinced that the wordplay is still probable in light of other witnesses to the pun (e.g., Exod 28:9; Lam 4:1–2; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.272; Matt 3:9; Luke 3:8).

¹⁵⁹ Snodgrass 2008, 290, citing 1QIsa^a 54:13; CD IV, 19; VIII, 12; Acts 4:11; citing also Stern 1989.

ily').¹⁶⁰ Evans also argues for authenticity on the basis of similarity to later rabbinic parables, some of which also end with a scriptural citation (e.g., the citation of Isaiah 5:7 in *Midr. Prov* 19:21).¹⁶¹ Johannes de Moor argues convincingly that because a much earlier Hebrew text from the Cairo Geniza links David with Psalm 118:22, though not in a specifically messianic sense, one cannot consider the citation of Ps 118:22–23 in the synoptics as a purely retrospective, Christian addition.¹⁶² Snodgrass further argues that the parable needs the quotation of Ps 118:22–23, for it is not until the quotation (the *nimshal*) that Jesus' addressees know the parable is directed against them (the scriptural citations are the final words of Jesus recorded before his addressees try to seize him in Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17–18; Matt 21:42–44); until this point it is plausible that some of Jesus' audience may not have identified themselves as the tenants.¹⁶³ Finally, though there is not widespread evidence (though cf. 4Q246 II, 1; 4Q369 frag. 1 II, 6–10; 4QFlor I, 10–13; Wis 2:18; Sir 4:10)¹⁶⁴ for a specifically messianic linkage with the word “son” in Jewish literature before the time of Jesus (and thus Jesus' hearers may not have immediately made a messianic connection based on his use of “son”), one does not need a specifically messianic parallel to consider it likely that Jesus' hearers could have understood a self-reference in the imagery of the son and stone.¹⁶⁵ These arguments regarding the authenticity of the Ps 118 citation also, clearly, depend on whether one considers it historically probable that the historical Jesus had a messianic understanding of himself.

¹⁶⁰ Evans 1995, 403.

¹⁶¹ Evans 1995, 390–394.

¹⁶² De Moor 1998, 77–78.

¹⁶³ Snodgrass 2008, 289–290; Horne also notes the subversive, unexpected reversal caused by the Ps 118:22–23 citation (Horne 1998, 111–113), though on the uncertain basis that the religious elite would have identified with the landowner.

¹⁶⁴ Culpepper 1999, 160.

¹⁶⁵ With Snodgrass 1983, 87; de Moor 1998, 75–76; contra Kloppenborg 2006, 83–85.

A corollary of the position that Matthew's version contains early and authentic features of the parable is that the version of the parable in the *Gospel of Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 65) does *not* represent the earliest version, but is dependent upon the Synoptic tradition. Several scholars argue that the Thomas version is most original due to its brevity and lack of apparently allegorical features.¹⁶⁶ Kloppenborg argues from the absurdity of the "interpretive perversity" one must ascribe to Thomas, if dependent on the synoptics (Thomas would reverse the identification of the owner with God to a villainous usurer, delete the conclusion to the parable, and detach the psalm quotation).¹⁶⁷ Kloppenborg also argues that *Gos. Thom.* is most realistic of the versions, having the least unrealistic, allegorical features, likely preserving more of the original parable.¹⁶⁸ However, it is not certain why brevity and a lack of features deemed allegorical must entail an earlier form (cf., e.g., Matthew's possible abbreviation of Mark 10:11–12 in Matt 19:9), nor is it certain that one can fully separate the allegorical synoptic versions from the non-allegorical Thomas version. *Gos. Thom.* 65 still teaches a lesson beyond the

¹⁶⁶ Koester 1983; Robinson 1975; Jeremias 1963; Kloppenborg 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Kloppenborg 2006, 270–271. The level of "perversity" ascribed to the Thomas version decreases if one interprets the vineyard owner in Thomas in a positive manner, reconstructing the text to read "a good man" instead (χρηστός instead of χρήστης), cf. Plisch 2008, 160–161; Gathercole 2014, 458–460. For an explanation of Thomas' redaction with reference to reduction and addition of realism, see Meier 2012, 137–145.

¹⁶⁸ Kloppenborg 2006, 242–349. Yet it is not clear that Kloppenborg's allegedly more realistic reconstruction for *Gos. Thom.* 65 could not also apply to the synoptic versions (Kloppenborg, 334). Kloppenborg argues the tenants in *Gos. Thom.* 65 more realistically try to *maintain their claim* to the land through repelling counter-claims by force, even murder, rather than trying to *inherit* the land by murdering the son as in the Synoptics. Could one not interpret the mindset of the synoptic tenants, who speak of "possessing" the son's inheritance (e.g., Matt 21:38, σχώμεν τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ) as based on the understanding that they are trying to maintain their claim, as in *Gos. Thom.* 65? The mention of the son's inheritance here by the synoptic tenants does not seem to be an appeal to some legal reality of inheritance by eliminating the heir (e.g., by the legal principle of *hazaqah*), but to the reality that by resisting the son they could maintain the possession of what is the son's by inheritance. Kloppenborg seems to require a woodenly rigid understanding of the gospels over against Thomas at this point.

story itself, perhaps regarding the folly of the wealthy.¹⁶⁹ The following additional arguments support this corollary regarding the secondary nature of *Gos. Thom.* 65: the Lukan word ἰσως (a NT *hapax legomenon*) appears twice in *Gos. Thom.* 65, strongly indicating dependence upon Luke's unique formulation of the parable;¹⁷⁰ the appearance of a citation of Ps 118:22 in *Gos. Thom.* 66, while very different from the handling of the Synoptics, seems to indicate some relationship of dependence with the synoptic versions; the tendency in *Gos. Thom.* is to omit explanatory material, leaving it to the reader to interpret the sayings recorded, thus partially explaining its redactional adaptation of the synoptic versions.¹⁷¹

2.4.2 The Authenticity of Matt 21:43 as a Saying of Jesus

If it is granted that the parable originates with the historical Jesus, what can be said of the uniquely Matthean saying in Matt 21:43? Preliminarily, if the parable is considered to be a juridical parable on the model of Isaiah 5, and the answer detailing an expectation of judgment upon the tenants by the owner is authentic (whether spoken by Jesus in Mark and Luke, or by his opponents, as in Matt 21:41), this strengthens the authenticity of Matt 21:43, for the verse is essentially an elaboration of the future transfer of the vineyard to other tenants already mentioned in Matt 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16. It is important to note that the concept of transferring a vineyard to other lessees is well attested in ancient sources.¹⁷² Matthew's version of 21:41, which records a self-condemning reply to Jesus by the chief priests and Pharisees, could be taken as authentic on the basis of its similarity

¹⁶⁹ Cf. argumentation in Gathercole 2012, 134–136; Tuckett 2014b, 411–412; for the meaning of the Thomas version, cf. Gathercole 2014, 460–461; Plisch 2008, 161; Kloppenborg 2006, 242–277.

¹⁷⁰ Kloppenborg 2006, 259–260 disputes this on the basis that the word ἰσως is not exclusively Lukan in the corpus of Greek language, and that the reverse is just as likely (that Luke drew from Thomas).

¹⁷¹ Tuckett 2014b, 411–412; Gathercole 2012, 135; Meier 2012, esp. 137–145.

¹⁷² Cf. Evans 1995, 384–385, 389, drawing upon Hengel 1968; Kloppenborg 2006, 338–340.

to other parables that share the same feature (e.g., 2 Sam 12:1–7; Isaiah 5:1–7), or it could be taken as a clever casting by Matthew in the same mold.¹⁷³ The unwitting reply could be interpreted as affirming the realistically subversive, unexpected nature of Jesus' parable, or it could be understood as Matthew's rhetoric to retrospectively heighten the shame of the Jewish leaders.¹⁷⁴ Dodd, Jeremias, and Hengel had reservations about the authenticity of Mark 12:9b, for Jesus characteristically did not answer questions he posed (though see the exceptions to this in Luke 17:7–10; 15:4–7, 8–10),¹⁷⁵ and the reply seems too dependent upon Isaiah 5.¹⁷⁶ Yet Dodd and Hengel, though they dispute the judgment pronouncement's authenticity, do consider the return of the owner in judgment as a natural conclusion to the story.¹⁷⁷ Kloppenborg further argues against the authenticity of Matt 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16, claiming that the return of the landowner to bring judgment upon the tenants himself is unrealistic (because it is illegal behavior, as he documents), thus further revealing its dependence upon Isaiah 5:4–6.¹⁷⁸

My response to these arguments against the authenticity of Matt 21:41 and parallels is essentially rooted in the prior argument about the authenticity of the Isaiah citations. If the historical Jesus used the parable of Isaiah to form his juridical parable recorded in the synoptics, the problems of the Isaianic similarities in the judgment pronouncement are not an issue, for this fits precisely with the character of the rest of the parable. My contention is that the similarities to Isaiah 5 do not count against the historicity of Jesus' sayings in this parable. Similarly, Kloppenborg's well-documented

¹⁷³ Kloppenborg 2006, 186.

¹⁷⁴ Kloppenborg 2006, 186.

¹⁷⁵ Noted by Kloppenborg 2006, 110, n. 14.

¹⁷⁶ Dodd 1961, 98; Jeremias 1963, 74; Hengel 1968, according to Kloppenborg 2006, 111; Robinson dismissed the rhetorical question itself as secondary, 1975, 449.

¹⁷⁷ Hengel 1968, 38; Dodd 1961, 110.

¹⁷⁸ Kloppenborg 2006, 235–236, 335–347..

argument against the realism of the master's vigilante justice has merit against the authenticity of Mark 12:9b and parallels only if one has already determined that the Isaiah allusions are secondary.¹⁷⁹ In fact, the ample evidence Kloppenborg adduces concerning various legal strictures regarding recovery of leased property is itself further evidence that a first-century audience could conceive of an individual acting *outside* those laws.

Common arguments against the authenticity of Matt 21:43 center upon the similarity of Matt 21:43 to other uniquely Matthean material:¹⁸⁰ the opening formula διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι seems particularly Matthean (e.g., 12:31); the summative nature of the saying fits other Matthean conclusions (e.g., 5:16; the last clause of 12:45; 16:12; 17:13); Matthew expands other fruit and tree themes in 7:16, 20; and, most clearly, the verse fits precisely with the uniquely Matthean paraenetic emphasis on fruit and fruit-bearing elsewhere in the parable.¹⁸¹ Gundry also argues that Matthew's composition of Matt 21:43 unwittingly created a discrepancy with the parable in his effort to heighten the failure of the Jewish leaders, "The discrepancy that in the parable fruits were produced but not given to the owner, whereas here [Matt 21:43] it is implied that fruits were not even produced under the tenancy of the Jewish leaders, confirms Matthew's composition of the parable."¹⁸² Additionally, Gundry thinks that a discrepancy is created in that the

¹⁷⁹ Snodgrass 2008, 292, also argues that despite Kloppenborg's proposed lack of realism in the owner's vengeance, and/or the expressly illegal character of thereof, a first-century audience would not require the owner to respond in a legally forthright manner in order to understand the sense that the tenants will be punished.

¹⁸⁰ Here I draw from Kloppenborg 2006, 188–191, who in turn draws primarily upon the arguments of Trilling 1964, 58–65.

¹⁸¹ Cf. the additional reference to the harvest: ὁ καιρὸς τῶν καρπῶν, Matt 21:34; cf. Mark 12:2; Luke 20:10; the additional descriptive clause related to proper production of fruit in 21:41.

¹⁸² Gundry 1994, 430.

vineyard of the parable is Israel, but the vineyard in Matt 21:43 is cast as the kingdom of God (in his view under the influence of Dan 2:44; 7:27; 1 Sam 15:28).¹⁸³

The response to these arguments continues the basic refrain throughout this study that Matthean emphases and characteristics do not necessarily entail a diminishing of authenticity. Gundry rightly identifies Matthew's different characterization of the transfer of the vineyard in terms of the kingdom of God (which remains to be defined for this study in chapter 3), but this characterization builds upon rather than nullifies or contradicts the prior identification of the vineyard as God's people, Israel and Judah, in Isaiah 5. Nor does this difference decrease its authenticity. The use of the verb ποιέω in Matt 21:43 perhaps draws from the same usage in LXX Isa 5:2, 4, 7. In this context ποιέω likely means produce in the sense of deliver.¹⁸⁴ The description of the fruit as characterized by the kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ...δοθήσεται ἔθνει ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς, 21:43) implies a contrast, as in Isaiah 5:7, with what the tenants did in fact produce, namely, rebellion and lawlessness, rather than the proper fruit intended by the owner.

Some scholars appeal to the phrase "kingdom of God" as rare in Matthew, and thus evidence against Matthean creation (note the identical phrase in Matthean passages shared with Luke and Mark: Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20; Matt 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25).¹⁸⁵ Kloppenborg, following Trilling, disputes the significance of this in light of the diversity of formulations beyond the typical "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew, and the occurrence of the same phrase in the preceding, Matthean parable of the two sons

¹⁸³ Gundry 1994, 429–430.

¹⁸⁴ Oppong-Kumi 2013, 277.

¹⁸⁵ Kloppenborg 2006, 189–190.

(21:31). Yet the variance in formulation does not dismiss the evidence of the shared language with Mark and Luke, and thus its evidence against Matthean invention.¹⁸⁶

The Matthean material does emphasize the paraenetic thrust of the parable (in typical Matthean language) through its development of fruit imagery, but not to the expense of authenticity. The emphases on fruit bearing are not alien, but derive from the parable on which Jesus' parable is based, Isaiah 5:1–7 (recalling again the central importance of the originality of Isaiah 5 to the parable of the tenants). Moreover, bearing fruit is a common theme in other sayings of Jesus (Mark 4:8; Matt 7:16–20; 12:33–35; 13:8; 21:19; Luke 6:43–44; 8:8; 13:6–9; John 15:2–16) and John the Baptist (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8). On the basis of these arguments I consider Matt 21:43 to be authentic to the historical Jesus. In the next chapter, I analyze the meaning of ἔθνος on the basis of this historical framework.

¹⁸⁶ Snodgrass 1983, 66.

Chapter 3

An Exegetical Analysis of Matt 21:43 Focusing on the Identity and Function of *Ethnos*

In this chapter, I present my exegesis of the meaning of ἔθνος in Matt 21:43 primarily within the context of 21:33–46 (sections 3.1–3.4), and in light of Matthew’s gospel (particularly section 3.5). I begin first by discussing whether v. 44 belongs in the text (section 3.1). In section 3.2, I discuss the immediate context of the parable of the wicked tenants and the surrounding scriptural citations (21:33–46), in which I conclude that v. 43 is an inference on the basis of the rejection of God’s mission in Jesus by the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees. In section 3.3, I analyze the meaning of the “kingdom of God” in v. 43, as well as the timing and nature of its transfer (removal and bestowal). I argue that the transfer of “the kingdom of God” primarily refers to the future transfer of leadership in God’s reign over God’s people, and the means of the transfer is the future death (removal) and resurrection of Jesus (bestowal). In section 3.4, focusing on the identity and function of ἔθνος, I examine grammatical and syntactical features of v. 43, the lexical meaning of ἔθνος, the contribution of the designation “who bear the kingdom’s fruit”, and the contribution of the contrast with “you.” I argue that ἔθνος refers to Jesus’ followers, who function as religious leaders in God’s kingdom among God’s people constituted anew by those who follow Jesus, replacing the errant religious leadership whom Jesus directly addressed. The ἔθνος does not replace Israel as a whole according to this verse, but takes up new leadership roles replacing the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes and Pharisees, signaling thereby a redefinition of such leadership based on God’s kingdom mission in Jesus. Lastly, in section 3.5, I consider the

relationship of the identity and function of ἔθνος in v. 43 to other depictions of Jesus and his followers in Matthew's gospel, briefly examining relevant passages which speak of similar leadership roles (esp. 16:19; 18:15–20; 28:16–20).

3.1 Textual Issues

Though the text of Matt 21:43 has no major textual issues,¹ there is significant question whether Matt 21:44 is original to Matthew's text. The early manuscript 104 (early to mid second century),² Codex Bezae (fifth century), manuscript 33 (9th century), third and fourth century Old Latin versions (a, b, d, e, ff1, ff2, r1), Syrus Sinaiticus (fourth or fifth century), Origen, and Eusebius attest to the omission of 21:44. Arguments against the consideration of Matt 21:44 as original include: the early insertion of the text in a majority of witnesses could be very plausibly explained by harmonization with Luke 20:18, which is better attested; the lack of good reason to omit the verse, if original (thus being a *lectio difficilior*); the recently discovered, early witness of manuscript 104, which omits 21:44, is further evidence (but not necessarily defeating evidence).³ Arguments for the originality of Matt 21:44 include: if the text here was copied from Luke, the two texts strangely do not match;⁴ if one were copying from Luke, one would logically place the verse after the Ps 118 citation, as in Luke 20:17, but in Matthew the verse follows Jesus'

¹ Codices, x, B, Θ, and minuscules 565, 700, 892 omit the ὅτι which introduces the speech of Jesus, while the corrector of Vaticanus, along with wider witnesses (C, D, K, L, W, Z, Δ, 0102, 33, 579, 1241, 1424, / 844, minuscule families 1 and 13, and Irenaeus) support its inclusion.

² Cf. Comfort and Barrett 2001, 643–644, though the text on the verso of this manuscript, on which the omission of 21:44 can be seen, is very obscure, see Thomas 1997, 9; for agreement that this papyrus witnesses to an omission of 21:44 in its exemplar, see Wasserman 2012, 101; Head 2000, 9.

³ Davies and Allison 1997, 3:186, n. 65; Metzger 1994, 47; Wasserman 2012, 101.

⁴ Particularly in the first half of the verse, compare the words underlined: καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται, Matt 21:44, vs. πάντες ὁ πεσὼν ἐπ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν λίθον συνθλασθήσεται, Lk 20:18.

summary declaration in 21:43;⁵ if one sees allusions to Daniel 2:44–45 in Matt 21:43 and 21:44, this would explain the latter’s place and strengthen its link with the original text.⁶ Robert Gundry unconvincingly seeks to explain the proposed later omission by the “awkwardness of the delay of v. 44” in Matthew, compared to Luke.⁷ Moreover, Snodgrass’ argument from an early allusion to Daniel 2:44–45 in Matt 21:43–44 could provide explanation for Matt 21:44’s interpolation, rather than its originality, as Snodgrass intends.⁸

It seems here that the arguments are quite balanced. Ultimately, I cannot dismiss the possibility of Matt 21:44’s originality, particularly in light of Luke’s clearly different witness to the same. Thus, in the subsequent analysis, I retain Matt 21:44 as part of the context of Matt 21:43, in spite of the serious objections to its originality in Matthew, while recognizing that any conclusion drawn from its data for the understanding of Matt 21:43 remains questionable on this basis.⁹

3.2 The Immediate Context of Matthew 21:43

In this section, I begin the exegetical analysis of Matt 21:43 by first accounting for its place within the immediate context, 21:33–46. The primary concern which structures this section is determining the connection, indicated by διὰ τοῦτο, with the preceding citation of Ps 118:22–23 (21:42), and the parable as a whole (21:33–41).

⁵ France 2007, 807, n. 3; Gundry 1994, 430–431; Snodgrass 2008, 286.

⁶ Snodgrass 1983, 67–68.

⁷ Gundry 1994, 431; a concept cited approvingly in Snodgrass 1983, 66.

⁸ Kloppenborg 2006, 195.

⁹ Thus I do not omit it entirely from the analysis, as in Davies and Allison 1997, 3:186–187; Kloppenborg 2006, 195–196.

Verse 43 is not an interruption,¹⁰ but follows directly from the citation of Ps 118:22–23, and further interprets the thrust of the parable of the tenants as a whole (particularly 21:41).¹¹ διὰ τοῦτο signals that Jesus draws a concluding inference based on Psalm 118:22–23, with which he clarifies his self-identification as the rejected stone and son, in contrast to his opponents as the builders and the tenants (a connection likely assisted by the paronomasia of “stone” and “son” in Hebrew).¹² The inference of 21:43 is on the basis of Jesus’ claim that the religious leadership (chief priests, elders of the people, Pharisees, cf. Matt 21:23, 45) has failed in their role as leaders of God’s people (i.e., tenants of the vineyard) by rejecting God’s mission culminating in and through Jesus (i.e., the representative son and heir of the vineyard, Israel). It is important to further develop this summary, firstly with regard to the parable itself, and secondly to the citation of Ps 118:22–23, in order to understand the remainder of Matt 21:43.

3.2.1 Matthew 21:43 in Relation to the Parable of the Wicked Tenants

In keeping with the argumentation in chapter 2, the parable of the tenants should be interpreted primarily as an allegorical, juridical parable adapting the imagery of Isaiah 5 (particularly regarding God, the vineyard, and its fruit).¹³ A basic function of the parable is to pronounce judgment on Jesus’ direct addressees, the religious leadership in

¹⁰ As in, e.g., Hannan 2006, 180; Gundry 1994, 430, citing discontinuity with the parable.

¹¹ So too France 2007, 816; Luz 2005, 3:35–36; Hagner 1995, 623, though he dismisses a connection with 21:42.

¹² Snodgrass 1983, 96–97.

¹³ Snodgrass 2008, 276, here labeled a “double indirect narrative parable” functioning to bring judgment. The classification “double indirect narrative” refers to the way Jesus speaks about the leaders and their relationship to God, Israel, and himself by speaking about different subjects (tenants) in a different setting (over a vineyard), linking this parable with, e.g., the parable of the two sons. Blomberg considers it a “complex three-point parable” in his treatment, citing the three points made about God’s patience, coming destruction upon the tenants, and the new leaders raised instead of the wicked tenants (Blomberg 1990, 247–251). Blomberg also considers that this parable may have a fourth point, namely to identify Jesus as the rejected Messiah of God (meriting the label “complex”). These two classifications are compatible, as they both accept the allegorical sense of the parable and its function as a condemnation of the Jewish leadership, while Blomberg’s classification is more helpful as to the parable’s structure.

Jerusalem. God is the owner (21:33, cf. Isaiah 5:7), and his people, Israel, are the vineyard planted and protected (cf. Isaiah 5:7, “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting,”¹⁴ matching similar imagery elsewhere, Jer 2:21; 6:9; Hos 14:4–9; Ps 80:9–20; 2 Kgs 19:30; Isa 3:14; 27:2–6; 37:31).¹⁵ In Isaiah’s parable, the fruit originally desired from the vineyard/Israel is righteousness and justice (*mišpāṭ* and *šēdāqāh*, LXX: *κρίσις* and *δικαιοσύνη*), but they produced lawlessness and a cry of distress (linked respectively with the previous by paranomasia in Hebrew, *mišpāh* and *šē‘āqāh*, LXX: *ἀνομία* and *κλαυγή*).

One of Jesus’ departures from the parable of Isaiah 5 occurred in his adaptation of the parable to be an indictment of the tenants, rather than the vineyard. The conflict in Jesus’ parable is that the tenants refused to give over to the owner the fruits that the vineyard had produced. To maintain control of the vineyard and its goods they violently resisted and killed the owner’s servants, and climactically, even his son. As the vineyard is clearly Israel in Isaiah 5:1–7, so too in the allegorical force of the parable which Jesus told: the “vineyard” represents the people of God, Israel, whom the religious leadership tended and managed on God’s behalf. The tenants “produced” precisely that which the

¹⁴ Quotation from the NRSV.

¹⁵ Rightly Davies and Allison 1997, 3:176; Luomanen 1998, 166; Talbert 2010, 251; France 2007, 810; Hagner 1995, 620; Keener 1999, 510; Osborne 2010, 786; Nolland 2005, 868–869; Morris 1992, 539. Hare disputes the identification of Israel with the vineyard in the parable on the basis of Jesus’ later designation of the vineyard as the kingdom of God in Matt 21:43, Hare 1993, 248. Similarly Snodgrass disputes that Isaiah 5 and thus Matthew’s version of the parable identify the vineyard as Israel, objecting, “How can Israel be taken away and given to others?” (Snodgrass 1983, 74). Snodgrass prefers instead the understanding that the vineyard is “the *people* as the possession of God” limited to the remnant and the privileges which belong to it (law, promises, activity of God), rather than the nation as a whole, citing links between plant and remnant imagery describing Israel, Snodgrass 1983, 74–76. The link of a remnant with plant imagery is clear in some places, e.g., 2 Kgs 19:30; Jer 6:9; Isa 37:31; however, plant imagery linked with Israel is clearly negative also in Deut 32:32; Hos 10:1; Jer 2:21, while vineyard, *kerem*, does not seem to appear in the OT with this explicit limitation to a remnant. It seems that Snodgrass resists the simple identification of the vineyard with Israel in the parable due to his interpretation of the kingdom of God in Matt 21:43, but such a resistance is not necessary. Rather, the leaders’ God-ordained positions of authority over the vineyard, the people of God, are taken away and given to God’s people, reconceived in light of the new work of God in Jesus. See further on the kingdom of God in Matt 21:43, section 3.3 below.

vineyard produced in Isaiah 5, lawlessness in their refusal to abide by the lease agreement, and a cry of distress in their violence against the owner's representatives. The fruit expected in Jesus' parable also represents righteousness, as in Isaiah, in light of references to fruit as obedience and faithful living (3:9; 7:16–20; 12:33; 13:8, 26).¹⁶ Notably, prior Jewish interpretation of the imagery in Isaiah 5 in terms of Temple architecture (e.g., 4Q500; 4Q162; 1 Enoch 89:50, 54, 56, 64–68, 73),¹⁷ may have assisted Jesus in successfully adapting Isaiah 5 to his parable against the religious leadership in the temple precinct.

Jesus' characterization of the leaders as the tenants of his parable amounts to a claim that they are rejecting God himself by rejecting Jesus. The son is the final representative of the owner among many, and thus plays a climactic, but supporting, role in the main conflict between the owner and the tenants.¹⁸ Jesus portrayed the religious leadership as resisting God, who established them in their leadership roles. In order to maintain their positions of control in the moral and religious life of God's people apart from God's desires, they resisted the son and other "servants," by which Jesus links himself to John the Baptist and the prophets more generally, as in 5:17; 11:9–11; 23:34, 37.¹⁹ The particular comment of the tenants before they kill the son is reminiscent of the

¹⁶ E.g., Kloppenborg 2006, 180–181. The precise meaning of "fruit" will be developed further with reference to Matthew's gospel and in 21:43 in section 3.4.3 below.

¹⁷ Kloppenborg 2006, 89–91; Luz 2005, 3:40, n. 47.

¹⁸ Rightly Blomberg 1990, 248. Thus I am resistant to Hare's understanding that the "key feature" of the parable is the mistreatment of the owner's representatives, unless one situates this in the larger conflict between the owner and his tenants, Hare 1993, 249.

¹⁹ In Matthew's narrative, immediately prior to this parable, Jesus criticizes the same audience on the basis of their rejection of John the Baptist (21:32), whose essential message is remarkably similar to Jesus' as presented in Matthew's gospel (cp., e.g., 3:2; 4:17). The description of the servants as stoned and killed likely recalls similar descriptions of prophets as slaves and servants of God in the OT and earlier Jewish literature, perhaps most clearly in the theme's recurrence in Matt 23:34–37 (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:36; 2 Kgs 14:25; Ezra 9:11; Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; 25:4; Dan 9:6, 10; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6; Ezek 38:17; Bar 2:20, 24; Philo, *Decal.* 178; 1QpHab II, 9; death by stoning, Zechariah in 2 Chr 24:17–22). For this general

LXX version of Gen 37:20, in which Joseph's brothers seek to kill him.²⁰ It is important to note that the rejection of God and his messengers is ascribed in the parable to the tenants, i.e., chief priests, elders, and Pharisees; no clear indication is made that the people of Israel as a whole is at fault.²¹ The import of Jesus' identification with the son of the parable is an implied claim to be a climactic, authoritative, and rejected representative of God to the leaders concerning their unresponsive and unfaithful management of Israel, and as the son of God, an heir of Israel. These claims converge well with Jesus' sayings elsewhere regarding his future vindication after rejection and death by the leadership in Israel, 16:21; 26:1–2, regarding his authority, 9:2–8; 12:1–8; 26:64; 27:11, regarding his divine sonship, 11:27;²² and regarding his being sent from God, 10:40; 15:24.²³

As outlined in chapter 2, the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees had diverse and fundamental roles in the religious life of the Jews. In addressing this parable to these groups, Jesus speaks subversively, claiming that their leadership and management of Israel vis-à-vis God was fully at odds with God's own desires for his people. From the perspective of the chief priesthood particularly (and perhaps by implication, the high priest), such a contrastive distinction between their work

observation, cf., e.g., Nolland 2005, 872; Kloppenborg 2006, 181; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:176; Snodgrass 1983, 79; Talbert 2010, 251–252.

²⁰ Luz 2005, 3:40; cp. Matt 21:38, δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν; LXX Gen 37:20, δεῦτε ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν.

²¹ With, representatively, Saldarini 1994, 60–63; Levine 1988, 208–209; contra, e.g., France 2007, 814, in which he describes the death of the son in the parable as “Israel's culminating act of rebellion.” France later qualifies this language by clarifying that v. 43 “is not to the exclusion of Jews as such, but only those whose lack of faith has debarred them from the kingdom of heaven” (France 2007, 816–817). According to the parable, strictly considered, it is the tenants' act of rebellion. However, as will be discussed below, the characterization and judgment of the parable would also apply to anyone who followed the tenants' lead in rejecting Jesus, surely.

²² Luz 2005, 3:37–38, with hesitations; Hagner 1995, 621; Snodgrass 1983, 84–87; Sabourin 1982, 773. Even if his hearers did not understand Jesus' self-reference to be messianic, they could have understood the son of the owner's significance in his heightened status in the dispute over the other servants. For evidence that ancient landowners sent agents of increasing social status in protracted disputes with tenants, see *PCairZen* I 59018, discussed in Kloppenborg 2006, 323–326.

²³ Summarized in Osborne 2010, 788.

and God's desires would likely have been blasphemous (cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.293–296; *C. Ap.* 2.194; Exod 22:28). Though one cannot reconstruct the thoughts of Jesus' addressees, the parable could have communicated to some a narrative that an illegitimate group has usurped God's people and rejected his messengers.²⁴ Their vehement expectation of judgment upon the rebellious tenants in response to Jesus' question after the parable (21:41)²⁵ is understandable not only by analogy to the concluding judgment of Isaiah's parable,²⁶ but also in light of numerous scriptural instances of expected judgment upon unfaithful leaders of God's people (e.g., Isa 3:14–15; Jer 12:10; Ezek 34:1–31).²⁷ In Matthew's narrative, as in 21:31, Jesus answers by affirming and reversing their response; the expectation of judgment upon others rebounds through Jesus' interpretation of Ps 118:22–23 in reference to himself, clarifying that they are the tenants and builders who rejected the stone and the son, and thus rejected God.

3.2.2 Matthew 21:43 in Relation to 21:42, 44

In its original context, Psalm 118 was a processional psalm (cf. the reference to the gate of YHWH, v. 20) celebrating God's salvation,²⁸ situated at the end of the Hallel psalms (113–118).²⁹ Though its original compositional situation is not clear, after its composition this psalm was used during festivals such as Passover and Sukkot, thereby giving

²⁴ Snodgrass 1983, 79–80.

²⁵ Though cf. Schnackenburg 2002, who considers this reply in 21:41 to be the crowd's reply. The most recent dialogue partners which Matthew records in his narrative are the chief priests and elders of the people (21:23–27, cf. their response in 31 to the parable of the two sons), and thus they are most likely the respondents in 21:41.

²⁶ Isa 5:5–6, including the rhetorical question anticipating the detail of judgment, Isa 5:3–4; Nolland 2005, 875.

²⁷ Turner 2008, 517; Snodgrass 1983, 76. It is also not clear that the response recorded in Matthew must represent the response of all of Jesus' addressees. Perhaps some of the leaders responded vehemently to Jesus because they identified Jesus himself as an errant and dangerous leader of the people, in an attempt to turn Jesus' parable against him.

²⁸ Allen 1983, 124; Kraus 1993, 395; Goldingay 2008, 355; Terrien 2003, 783; Goulder 1998, 182–191.

²⁹ Grogan 2008, 193; Goldingay 2008, 355.

poignancy to its occurrences in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' activity in Jerusalem during the days leading up to Passover (cf. Matt 26:1–2, 17–19).³⁰ The one who has been saved by YHWH (whether only the individual who recalls God's redemption, Ps 118:5–21, or as a synecdoche for the people of Israel as a whole, more likely) is likened to a stone originally rejected for use by builders, but ultimately placed in a prominent and significant place, all by the surprising and wondrous work of YHWH.³¹

Earlier in Matthew's narrative, the crowd's use of the same Psalm (particularly 118:26) to bring acclamation to Jesus as the son of David (both as he enters Jerusalem and after he has performed his act in the temple) becomes a point of contention between Jesus and the religious leadership (Matt 21:9–11, 15–16). As noted earlier in chapter 2, the targum of Ps 118:22 and a fragment from the Cairo Geniza describe David as the rejected stone, giving further plausibility to the crowd's association of Jesus as son of David and their use of Ps 118:26, though the targum evidence may be significantly later than the time of Jesus.³² The word “builders” is used negatively of Jewish religious leaders in earlier Qumran documents (1QIsa^a LIV, 13; CD IV, 19; VIII, 12, 18) and neutrally of leaders in general by Paul,³³ and thus likely assisted Jesus' audience in making the identifications that he is the stone, and his opponents the builders.³⁴

³⁰ *m. Sukkah* 3:9; 4:5; *m. Pesahim* 10:5–7; *b. Pesahim* 116b; 119a; Grogan 2008, 193; Goldingay 2008, 335; Evans 2005, 557; for an overview of positions on its original compositional situation, see Goulder 1998, 182.

³¹ Kraus 1993, 399–400; Goldingay 2008, 361–362; Grogan 2008, 194. Goulder 1998, 189, 191 thinks the stone likely refers to the temple, citing Zechariah's words about the headstone of Zion (Zech 4:7) and his reconstruction of this psalm's post-exilic situation, spoken by an Asaphite Levite after the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 6).

³² de Moor 1998, 77–78; Evans 2005, 556–557; Tg. Ps. 118:22 reads: “The architects forsook the youth among the sons of Jesse, but he was worthy to be appoint king and ruler,” Stec, 2004.

³³ Paul refers to himself as a master builder, ἀρχιτέκτων, in 1 Cor 3:10, and refers to the “building” (ἐποικοδομέω) activity of others, 1 Cor 3:10, 12.

³⁴ Evans 2005, 560; Snodgrass 1983, 96.

On the basis of the link in Hebrew between “son” and “stone,” it seems clear that Jesus applies Ps 118:22–23 to himself as the rejected stone, thereby characterizing the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees as the rejecting builders, those who disregarded the stone originally in Ps 118. Jesus does not mean to refer to the elect community as a temple or the temple itself by citing this “stone” saying, despite possible allusions to temple architecture, because the previous rejection of the parable’s son, Jesus, seems to determine the referent of the stone.³⁵ More important than the rejection of the stone *per se*, is the fact that the rejection of the stone implies the rejection of the wondrous, saving work of God himself on behalf of his people, Israel. While Jesus establishes his point that the leaders reject him, the larger point Jesus makes with Ps 118:22–23 is that the leaders reject God’s own work. Moreover, Jesus adds to the sense of the parable by claiming future vindication of himself by God over against those who have rejected him. Therefore, here may be an implied reference to Jesus’ future resurrection (as in Matt 16:21–22).³⁶ This double rejection on the part of the leaders, both of God and his climactic representative, Jesus, comports with the thrust of the preceding parable.

Verse 21:44, if original to Matthew, affirms the christological emphasis of the preceding verses and further sharpens the warning of future judgment against Jesus’ addressees in light of their rejection of him.³⁷ Following v. 43, it provides further allusions to Daniel and Isaiah. That the stone here likely refers to Jesus, rather than the

³⁵ With Nolland 2005, 877, contra Stanton 1992, 152; Keener 1999, 515, citing uses of stone imagery to depict the Qumran community as a temple in 1QS VIII, 5, 8–9; IX, 6. The community defined by the rejected stone, Christ, may be an implicit referent here, but is not primary, cf. France 2007, 815.

³⁶ E.g., Davies and Allison 1997, 3:184–185; Snodgrass 1983, 101–103; France 2007, 811, 815; Osborne 2010, 790; Nolland 2005, 878: “...once we have a son who is killed, at least in our present Gospels we can hardly envisage vindication of that son without restoration to life.”

³⁷ As commonly understood, e.g., in Snodgrass 1983, 104; Hare 1993, 250; Osborne 2010, 791; Luz 2005, 3:43; Turner 2008, 516; France 2007, 818; Keener 1999, 516; Hagner 1995, 623.

church, seems clear in light of the identification of Jesus as the stone of v. 42.³⁸ Verse 44 is likely a composite allusion using the stone imageries of Isaiah 8:14–15 (v. 44a), and Dan 2:34–35, 44–45 (v. 44b). In Isaiah 8:14–15, the rock upon which some in Israel stumble in judgment is God; yet Jesus interprets the stone as himself (similarly, John the Baptist understood scripture as referring to Jesus, e.g., in Matt 3:3; Isa 40:3).³⁹ The stone of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:34–35, 44–45) comes to symbolize in Daniel an everlasting kingdom which crushes other kingdoms. Jesus now applies this to himself, clarifying again that the coming kingdom centers on him, warning his addressees concerning future judgment in response to their rejection of him.⁴⁰ This judgment saying is thus broader in scope than that of v. 41 and 43, for the stone of Daniel 2 crushes *all* other kingdoms. If original to Matthew, this would not detract from Jesus’ focus on the religious leadership in Jerusalem, but would further elaborate that the criticisms similarly apply to anyone who shares their perspective and behavior.

The double rejection of God represented in Jesus is the basis (διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν...) for Jesus’ interpretive elaboration in verse 43 concerning the coming judgment upon the religious leadership and the transfer of the vineyard (from 21:41). As with his caustic introduction to the citation of Ps 118:22–23 (οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς...), Jesus claims personal authority over against his addressees for what follows by prefacing his statement with the phrase “I say to you...”⁴¹ Thus Jesus established with this preamble that his subsequent speech was a further enacted instance of his role as

³⁸ Contra Schnackenburg 2002, 212. Schnackenburg is surely justified in understanding that the church is implied, being part of the kingdom represented in the stone, Jesus.

³⁹ Gundry 1994, 44–45; France 2007, 818.

⁴⁰ Thus the additional link of stone, son, and kingdom imagery would tie together vv. 42–44, Luomanen 1998, 165–166.

⁴¹ Cf. similar usage in other judgment pronouncements throughout the gospel, e.g., Matt 5:20, 22, 26, 28, 32; 6:2; 10:15; 11:22; 12:31, 36; 18:3, 21:31; 24:2. However, this basic preface is not unique to judgment pronouncements in Matthew’s gospel.

God's climactic representative to the religious leadership concerning God's people. The following section begins the discussion of this speech in more detail.

3.3 The Transfer of the Kingdom of God

In this section, I first discuss the meaning of "the kingdom of God" in Matthew 21:43 in light of a brief survey of the "kingdom" in the Gospel. Second, I discuss the meaning of the kingdom's removal and transfer. In summary, I argue that the transfer of "the kingdom of God" primarily refers to the future transfer of leadership in God's kingdom over God's people, and the means of the transfer is the death and resurrection of Jesus.

3.3.1 The Kingdom of God in Matthew's Gospel

The word βασιλεία can mean either (a) the spatial territory or domain of a ruler (e.g., Matt 4:8; Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.5, 7); or (b) the exercise of royal rule generally (e.g., Sir 10:8; 1 Macc 1:16).⁴² Gustaf Dalman is credited with a seminal argument that in Old Testament and Jewish literature, the Hebrew *mlkwt* predominately refers to royal rule or sovereignty rather than territory (e.g., 1 Chr 29:30); however, especially in the Gospels, it becomes impossible and unhelpful to maintain this distinction when Jesus speaks of entering the kingdom (e.g., Matt 5:20; Mark 9:47).⁴³ As J. C. O'Neill summarizes, "reign is over a realm," whether considered spatially or in terms of people influenced, etc.⁴⁴

While Jesus does not speak in terms of a physical realm with geographical borders

⁴² These two basic meanings are offered in *BDAG* (2000), s.v. βασιλεία, ας, ἡ; Silva 2014a, 483, who in this work updates that of Klappert 1986; *LN*, s.v. βασιλεία, ας, f; Luz 1990, 201; Schmidt 1964, 579–580. *LSJ* (1996), s.v. βασιλεία, ἡ, includes under the second, general meaning also the office of royal rule (e.g., LXX Es 1:19; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1273a, 37; Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.11), while *DGE*, s.v. βασιλεία, ας, ἡ, treats this meaning ("monarquía, realeza, trono") as separate from "autoridad, ejercicio del poder, soberanía". Both *LSJ* and *DGE* also identify a common use of the word to designate the reign of a ruler through time (e.g., Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 17.1).

⁴³ See Dalman 1898, 77, cited in O'Neill 1993, 130; for discussion of this issue see Aalen 1962, 219–220, *passim*; Pennington 2007, 254–255; O'Neill 1993, 131.

⁴⁴ O'Neill 1993, 131; Pennington 2007, 181–185.

relative to the earth, his metaphorical development of the kingdom of God includes spatial aspects.

The word βασιλεία appears frequently throughout Matthew in a variety of ways, often with the Matthean characterization “of heaven.”⁴⁵ There seems to be no referential distinction between “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew, but only a difference in connotation.⁴⁶ Aside from its use in 21:43, the following is a brief survey of the occurrences of βασιλεία in Matthew related to the kingdom of God, whether designated as the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God,⁴⁷ “his” kingdom referring to the son of man,⁴⁸ or simply the kingdom:⁴⁹

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples preach that it is coming;⁵⁰ it belongs to the poor in spirit, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, children, and the “sheep” who serve others;⁵¹ some will enter it, e.g., those whose righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, and those who do the will of Jesus’ father;⁵² some will not enter it or be cast out of it, e.g., those who merely call Jesus “Lord”, those who do not become as children, and the scribes and Pharisees;⁵³ those

⁴⁵ Occurring in 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19–20; 7:21; 8:11–12; 11:11–12; 13:11, 19–52; 16:19; 18:3–4, 23–35; 19:12, 14, 23–24; 20:1–16; 22:1–14; 23:13; 25:1–13.

⁴⁶ Key evidence in this issue is 1) the parallel use of the two phrases in 19:23–24 witnessing to relative synonymity, and 2) the varied use of “kingdom” with other designations, showing that if a substantial referential difference existed between kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven, this would lead to confusion when this terminology is not used, cf. Allison 1997, 392; Pennington 2007, 303–310; Thomas 1993; contra Pamment 1981. If “kingdom of heaven” were a consistent circumlocution for God in Matthew, it seems odd that references to the “kingdom of God” would remain as they do. The conclusion of Pennington seems most reasonable: the varied kingdom expressions “denote God’s kingdom,...but the forms of the expressions have different *connotations*; they perform slightly different functions literarily and theologically.” (original emphasis, Pennington 2007, 310). Pennington considers such connotations for “kingdom of heaven” to be an emphasis on the heavenly, other-worldly qualities of the kingdom in contrast to earthly kingdoms (Pennington 2007, 321–330).

⁴⁷ See 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; see also the “kingdom of their father”, 13:43; “your” kingdom referring to God, 6:10; Jesus’ reference to the kingdom “of my father”, 26:29.

⁴⁸ See 13:41; 16:28, cf. “your” kingdom referring to Jesus, 20:21.

⁴⁹ See 4:23; 8:12; 9:35; 13:19, 38; 24:14; 25:34.

⁵⁰ See 3:2; 4:17; 10:7, cf. the message or word of the kingdom, 13:19, the “good news” of the kingdom, 4:23; 9:35; 24:14, the commission to proclamation, 28:16–20.

⁵¹ See 5:3, 10; 19:14; 25:31–46.

⁵² See 5:20; 7:21; the sheep who served others, 25:31–46; the tax collectors and prostitutes who enter before the chief priests and elders of the people, 21:31; the sons of the kingdom signified by wheat in a field, 13:38, 43; the many from east and west invited to the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 8:11.

⁵³ See 7:21; 18:3; 23:13; cf. the rich who enter it only with much difficulty, 19:23–24; those who act lawlessly will be cast out, 13:41; those who did not serve others will be eternally punished, 25:31–46; the “sons of the kingdom” who will be cast out of the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 8:12.

who humble themselves and do the law will be great in it, while those who break the law and teach others to do the same will be called least in it;⁵⁴ Jesus' disciples are taught its secrets, taught to pray for its coming, and to seek it first rather than food, drink, and clothing;⁵⁵ Jesus granted its keys to Peter, while the Pharisees shut others out of it;⁵⁶ in Jesus' exorcisms by the spirit of God, it has come;⁵⁷ yet the son of man is still to come in his reign in judgment, 16:28, and Jesus will not drink wine until he does so again with his disciples in the future kingdom, 26:29. Lastly, in Jesus' parables, the kingdom is likened to a field full of wheat and weeds to be sorted at harvest time (13:24–30), a tiny mustard seed that produces a large tree (13:31–32), yeast which leavens flour (13:33), a treasure found in a field which compels the one who found it to sell all to possess it (13:44), a valuable pearl which a merchant sells all to purchase (13:45–46), a net which catches good and bad fish to be judged and sorted (13:47–50), a forgiving king who brings judgment upon his unforgiving slave whose debt the king had forgiven (18:23–35), a landowner who gives the same daily wage to day laborers who worked for varying durations (20:1–16), a king celebrating his son's wedding, who is rejected by his initial invitees, yet then generously invites everyone available, but casts out one who was not properly dressed (22:1–14), ten attendants awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom, half of whom were prepared for his coming and entered the wedding, and half of whom were unprepared and were excluded (25:1–13).

From this brief survey of Matthew, one can summarize that the kingdom of heaven (kingdom of God) in Jesus' preaching has the following key characteristics: the kingdom is heavenly and transcendent, belonging to and coming from God alone, in contrast to earthly kingdoms; the kingdom is enacted in history by the God of Israel for the restoration of God's people through Jesus the Messiah's words and actions; entry and exclusion from the kingdom are defined only by one's response to God's work and words in Jesus, often reversing expectations of entry or exclusion; the kingdom is imminently future, judgment and final consummation await;⁵⁸ the kingdom is not wholly future, it is

⁵⁴ See 5:19; 18:4; the one who is least in it will yet be greater than John the Baptist, 11:11; the mother of the sons of Zebedee ask Jesus if her sons could have prime positions in his kingdom, 20:21.

⁵⁵ See 6:10, 33; 13:11; cf. the scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom and will bring out new and old treasures, 13:52; those who are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, 19:12.

⁵⁶ See 16:19; 23:13; cf. those who have zealously sought after and seized it since the time of John the Baptist, 11:12.

⁵⁷ 12:28; see also the conjunction of Jesus' preaching the kingdom and healing various diseases, 4:23; 9:35.

⁵⁸ Contra Dodd 1961, e.g., 33–59.

present in history through Jesus;⁵⁹ the response demanded by God's saving work through Jesus involves exclusive and complete allegiance, often subverting typical behavior and ethics; the kingdom is universal in scope, centering on Israel but extending to all nations; the kingdom purposes of God are realized decisively in Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sins and his vindication by resurrection from the dead; the final consummation of the kingdom on earth lies in the future, with the *parousia* of the son of man in judgment and final salvation.⁶⁰

3.3.2 The Kingdom of God in Matt 21:43

As set out in chapter 1, interpreters differ in two primary ways regarding the interpretation of the kingdom of God in v. 43. The first view, simply put, is to understand the kingdom as referring to inclusion in the kingdom, while the second is to understand the kingdom of God as referring to leadership in the kingdom among God's people. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive (leadership over the people of God implies inclusion), but represent differences of emphasis. In what follows below, I argue for the second view, in light of the parallel of v. 43 with v. 41, and thus in light of the entire parable and its discursive situation in the temple precinct.⁶¹

The statement of 21:43 concerning the kingdom of God is tied to the judgment of the parable, and thus the parable shapes its meaning. That Jesus speaks of the "kingdom of God" rather than the typical kingdom of heaven could simply be a stylistic variant of

⁵⁹ Contra Schweitzer 1950, e.g., 46–52, *passim*.

⁶⁰ For this summary, I draw from Kümmel 1957, 19–87, 105–140, 155; Beasley-Murray 1986, 144–146, 338–344; O'Neill 1993, 131–141; Yarbrough 108–123; Ladd 1993, 60–67; Farmer 1987, 126–130; Green 2013, 473–475; Silva 2014a, 483–488; Hannan 2006, 230–232. For a succinct discussion of early and mid-20th century interpretation of the kingdom of God, see the following essays, each in the same volume, Willis 1987, Hiers 1987, Epp 1987, Elmore 1987; cf. the longer treatment in Lundström 1963.

⁶¹ With Keener 1999, 515; Turner 2008, 516–517; Talbert 2010, 252; Saldarini 1994, 62; Carter 2000, 429; Levine 1988, 210–211; Hannan 2006, 180; Konradt 2014, 186.

Jesus, yet it does seem to affirm the parable's consistent emphasis on the opposition between the tenants and God, and links this statement with the same phrase in 21:31.⁶² Particularly, 21:43 interprets the statement of 21:41 concerning the owner's destruction of the rebellious tenants and his leasing the vineyard to other tenants. The two verses are parallel.⁶³ The removal of the kingdom of God in v. 43 corresponds to the destruction of the tenants in v. 41, while the giving of the kingdom in v. 43 corresponds to the leasing of the vineyard to other farmers in v. 41 (including a parallel statement unique to Matthew describing the others as those who are fruitful in both verses). God (the owner) is the subject of v. 41 (ἀπολέσει, with the passive verb ἐκδώσεται implicitly referring to him as the agent), and God is also the implied agent of the passive verbs ἀρθήσεται and δοθήσεται in v. 43 (fittingly, as the kingdom belongs to God).

Though John Nolland does not elaborate, he considers the identification of the kingdom of God with the vineyard a “mistake.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Arland Hultgren objects, “there is no basis for saying that [the kingdom] is equivalent to the vineyard.”⁶⁵ Charles Carlston also objects against the identification of the kingdom of God with Israel, “since Israel cannot be taken away or given to another.”⁶⁶ However, it is not clear why this objection has force, for this passage does not discuss the transfer of God's possession of Israel (the owner does not sell the vineyard, for example, but leases it to others). The parable of the wicked tenants details precisely how Israel can be “given”, i.e., given to human leadership for the people's care and the advancement of God's intentions. In the

⁶² Gundry 1994, 423, 430; contra Thomas 1993, 146, who argues that the phrase “kingdom of God” in Matthew points especially to key issues in play in Matthew's community, and thus here in 21:43, a dispute over the legitimacy of Gentile mission.

⁶³ So, e.g., Luz 2005, 3:42.

⁶⁴ Nolland 2005 878, n. 120. In support of the link between vineyard and kingdom, cf., e.g., Gundry 1994, 430; Hannan 2006, 181–182.

⁶⁵ Hultgren 2000, 373.

⁶⁶ Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 141–142, n. 55; so too Hultgren 2000, 373.

same way, this leadership can be taken away and given to others, which is the force of the parable and the primary force of 21:43.⁶⁷ The problem these scholars point to arises only if one considers the transfer of the vineyard/kingdom of God in a sense apart from the logic of the parable. It appears that Jesus did not mean to identify the kingdom and the vineyard in every way, for Jesus did not repeat the language of “vineyard” in v. 43. Yet it seems clear that there is a strong parallelism between the two in these verses. This parallelism allows the vineyard of the parable to influence the meaning of the kingdom, while the language of the kingdom transforms the meaning of the vineyard.

As noted above, by virtue of the parallel between v. 43 and v. 41, the kingdom of God is likened to Israel, God’s people, and its removal is likened to the destruction of the religious establishment in Jerusalem. Considered lexically in light of this context, then, the meaning of βασιλεία in v. 43 is a sphere of influence over a people. The genitive τοῦ θεοῦ describing βασιλεία should be considered as a subjective genitive, further signaling that God reigns over this sphere of influence.⁶⁸ The kingdom of God is not identified with Jesus’ addressees and the ἔθνος who will receive it, but is conceived as separate from them.

As the kingdom of God is linked with the vineyard in v. 43, this implies that the kingdom of God secondarily refers to the diverse roles the religious leadership held for God’s people, Israel, now taken away and given to others because of their opposition to God, represented through Jesus.⁶⁹ This is all the more likely given the historical setting in

⁶⁷ See similar argumentation in Oppong-Kumi 2013, 278.

⁶⁸ Hannan 2006, 182 describes the kingdom of God here as “the domain where God exercises his saving presence.” Another possibility for τοῦ θεοῦ is the possessive genitive, signaling that the realm or sphere of influence belongs to God, as opposed to the religious leadership.

⁶⁹ Thus implying that the kingdom of God is something the leaders’ in fact possess, but will in the future no longer.

the temple precinct, with the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees as Jesus' addressees. Yet this is not all that is meant, for Jesus does not simply repeat the language of "vineyard" in v. 43, but modifies it significantly beyond the parable's imagery.⁷⁰

One should interpret this saying within the understanding of the kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching. Most relevant for this text is the immediately preceding mention of the kingdom of God in 21:31, in which Jesus told the same addressees that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter into the kingdom ahead of them on the basis of their faithful response to John the Baptist (and by extension, Jesus) in contrast to the direct addressees' unbelief and lack of repentance (21:28–32; cf. John the Baptist's similar denunciation of some Pharisees and Sadducees, 3:7–10). Relevant also are the various passages in which Jesus teaches that those who expect or claim to be part of God's kingdom will in fact be excluded from it (the "sons of the kingdom," 8:11–12; those who merely call Jesus "lord," 7:21). Particularly with regard to scribes and Pharisees, Jesus recognized their prevalent teaching authority (23:2–3), but claimed that they do not enter the kingdom nor allow others to go in who are on their way in (23:13), and that one's righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom (5:20, the righteousness defined by, fulfilled, and given through Jesus).⁷¹

In light of Matthew's understanding of the kingdom, Jesus transforms the parable's conception of the vineyard to refer to the people of God now defined by God's work in and through Jesus. Because God's people are now defined by the present and

⁷⁰ Thus Saldarini's claim that "the vineyard, Israel, remains the same" cannot be true to the text here (Saldarini 1994, 60–61).

⁷¹ Following Deines' interpretation of this key passage and its surroundings, summarized in Deines 2008a, esp. 73–82; cf. also Hagner 2008, 173.

coming kingdom of God in and through Jesus, the removal of the leadership over Israel (due to their rejection of Jesus) signals not only their loss of position, but their exclusion from the people of God (and thus their destruction, as in v. 41).⁷² The removal and bestowal of the kingdom of God in v. 43 refers to the removal and bestowal of future leadership roles in God's reign over his people, and thus also inclusion among this people, and inclusion in God's kingdom.⁷³ John Nolland succinctly summarizes the logic of this statement, "leadership destroyed; the vineyard itself transmuted into the Christian community; and new leadership instated," with "Christian" meaning a community of disciples led by Jesus.⁷⁴ Thus it seems clear that this cannot be a mere change in leadership,⁷⁵ for the vineyard, Israel, is constituted now by those who follow Jesus, thus requiring a response of faith concerning Jesus for all who wish to be included among God's people. As elsewhere in the Gospel, the kingdom has future aspects seen in the future tense of the verbs of v. 43, but present aspects are also implied as well, given the ongoing rejection by Jesus' addressees and the growing community of disciples around Jesus before this confrontation. In the next section, I will analyze briefly the two main verbs of 21:43, ἀρθήσεται and δοθήσεται, further exploring the implied timing and means of this transfer of the kingdom of God.

⁷² Thus the pronouncement of v. 43 is not any less harsh or condemnatory than the destruction mentioned in v. 41, contra Snodgrass 1983, 90.

⁷³ With Konradt 2014, 186–189, 193, citing thematic connections to the keys of the kingdom belonging to Peter and the disciples in 16:19, 18:15–20.

⁷⁴ Nolland 2005, 876; similarly, Michaels 1987, 114, 116.

⁷⁵ As in, e.g., Levine 1988, 210; rightly criticized by, e.g., Olmstead 2011; Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 257, n. 44; France 2007, 816.

3.3.3 Timing and Means of the Transfer of the Kingdom

In this section, I begin my analysis by considering relevant intertextual clues which assist in understanding the kingdom's removal and bestowal, both within the OT and Matthew's gospel. Second, I analyze the implied timing and means of the transfer.

Possible allusions to the Old Testament form relevant background for the transfer of the kingdom of God in 21:43,⁷⁶ e.g., God's removal of the kingdom from Saul and its bestowal to David, pronounced by Nathan in 1 Sam 15:28,⁷⁷ the removal of the illegitimate shepherds of Israel in Ezek 34:10,⁷⁸ and the eschatological kingdom established by God in Dan 2:44 (and given to his holy ones in Dan 7:27).⁷⁹ Jesus once more subverts the assumption of his addressees to be included in God's people while rejecting Jesus, and declares a different people to be the future leaders of God's eschatological kingdom, possibly in analogy to the holy people of the Most High to whom the kingdom is given in Dan 7:27.⁸⁰

In Matthew's gospel, God similarly gave authority to Jesus (cf. the healing of the paralytic man, 9:8, claimed fully by the resurrected Jesus, 28:18). In the parable of the laborers, the owner gives freely as he chooses, not according to expected wages (20:14). Jesus, in turn, gives authority to his disciples, commissioning them in their mission of

⁷⁶ The transfer of leadership over God's people (its removal and bestowal to others) also recalls Jesus' saying that similarly combines the two verbs used in v. 43 (αἶρω and δίδωμι): "For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" (13:12; 25:29).

⁷⁷ LXX 1 Sam 15:28: Διέρορξεν κύριος τὴν βασιλείαν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ χειρὸς σου καὶ δώσει αὐτὴν τῷ πλησίον σου τῷ ἀγαθῷ ὑπὲρ σε.

⁷⁸ Talbert 2010, 252.

⁷⁹ Noted in Davies and Allison 1997, 3:186; Gundry 1994, 429–430; Carter 2000, 429–430.

Adding further plausibility to this connection with Daniel specifically, Pennington rightly argues that the heaven/earth and kingdom imagery of Daniel 2–7 is highly influential in Matthew's Gospel (particularly "kingdom of heaven"), citing the Son of Man sayings, the theme of God as revealer of mysteries, and the explicit reference to Daniel in 24:15 (Pennington 2007, 285–293).

⁸⁰ LXX Dan 7:27: καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν καὶ τὴν μεγαλειότητα αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν πασῶν τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν βασιλειῶν ἔδωκε λαῷ ἁγίῳ ὑψίστου βασιλεῦσαι βασιλείαν αἰώνιον, καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἐξουσίαι αὐτῷ ὑποταγήσονται καὶ πειθαρχήσουσιν αὐτῷ.

preaching, healing, exorcism (10:1, 7–8), and discipleship (28:18–20). Jesus also promises them authority to bind and loose, likely concerning authoritative interpretation of scripture and thus community discipline according to Jesus’ teaching (giving the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” to Peter specifically, 16:19, the authority to bind and loose to the disciples generally, 18:18–20).⁸¹ The chief priests and elders of the people just prior to this saying question Jesus’ authority by asking who gave it to him (21:23). With the divine passive δοθήσεται, Jesus claims God himself is the agent of this kingdom transfer, once more exercising his own authority to speak for God implied throughout the passage (21:33–44, cf. also 21:28–32).

The timing of the transfer is yet future for Jesus (taking the future verbs here at face value). The removal of the kingdom from the leaders implies that they had possession of it, in some sense, as the established leaders of Israel. Craig Evans also rightly points to the presently active work of the kingdom’s transfer already in the rejection of Jesus by some and the commitment to Jesus by others beyond Israel (e.g., the centurion of 8:1–13).⁸² Jesus’ declaration of the transfer is a present promise of future completion and fulfillment. Yet considering the timing of this transfer requires an interpretation as to the event, or events, which effect the transfer. Strictly within the context of the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33–46), the timing and means of the transfer is vague, though Jesus’ identification as the murdered son in the parable likely indicates that his death coincides with this future transfer.

Interpretation of the means of the transfer must be able to account for both the removal of the leadership roles belonging to the chief priests, elders of the people,

⁸¹ As interpreted in, e.g., Nolland 2005, 681; Konradt 2014, 186–187.

⁸² Evans in Carlston and Evans 2014, 417–418.

scribes, and Pharisees, and a bestowal of such leadership to others. Given the centrality of Jerusalem (and particularly the Temple) for the leadership roles of Jesus' addressees, one might be directed to the destruction of the temple as a means to realize the transfer of leadership. There seems to be no implied reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (or the Temple) by the Romans in this verse, though given Jesus' predictions of the temple destruction elsewhere (24:1–2) it cannot be entirely excluded.⁸³ This in fact was an effective means of bringing the leadership roles of the aristocratic elite in Jerusalem to an end (chief priests, elders, Sadducees), but this doesn't readily serve as a means for the bestowal of leadership to others. Given the christological themes throughout this passage, the implied timing of the removal and granting of the kingdom most likely refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁸⁴

Just as the tenants' murder of the son brought judgment, so too the complete removal of their position follows after the crucifixion of Jesus. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' atoning death and vindication by resurrection are the climactic fulfillment of God's kingdom purposes (1:21, 23; 16:21; 20:17–18, 28; 26:28; 28:18). One's response to God's work in Jesus is the determining factor for inclusion in the people of God, thus any attempt to lead God's people apart from the work and teaching of Jesus is obsolete and rebellious. For example, as shown in the tearing of the inner Temple veil at Jesus' death (27:51–53), the physical and visual protections from God's holy presence among a sinful people have been removed, signaling that God's presence is no longer protected in the

⁸³ For those who see a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem here, see, e.g., Carter 2000, 429, Luz 2005, 3:41; criticized in Snodgrass 1983, 88. Even if one supposes that 22:7 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, this does not necessarily impact the interpretation of judgment in 21:43. This issue also depends on one's dating of the gospel in general, and whether one considers it likely that Jesus made the predictions concerning the Temple's destruction.

⁸⁴ Davies and Allison 1997, 3:186; Schnackenburg 2002, 212.

temple but made openly accessible in and through Jesus, by means of his atoning death on a cross.⁸⁵ This renders the present religious establishment (whose work centers on the Temple and its cult, whether directly or indirectly) obsolete apart from Jesus, thus “taking away” their leadership role as they maintain their opposition to Jesus. Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus leads to the commission of his disciples by divine, cosmic authority for worldwide kingdom proclamation and discipleship of the people of God defined by the Messiah (28:18–20).

3.4 The Identity and Function of the *Ethnos* Who Produce the Kingdom’s Fruit

In this section, I bring the preceding discussion to bear on the analysis of the meaning of ἔθνος in v. 43. First, I discuss relevant grammatical and syntactical features of v. 43. Second, I analyze the lexical meaning of ἔθνος. Third, I discuss the particular contribution of the participial phrase ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς. Fourth, I discuss the nature and contribution of the contrast between “you” and ἔθνος.

3.4.1 Relevant Grammatical and Syntactical Features

Before examining the particular lexical meaning of ἔθνος in v. 43, here I review relevant grammatical and syntactical features of v. 43. The particular dative form ἔθνει indicates its function as the indirect object of the verb δοθήσεται, modified by the attributive participial phrase ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς modifying ἔθνει.⁸⁶ The anarthrous

⁸⁵ Gurtner 2007, 138–198.

⁸⁶ That this participial phrase is not an adverbial participle modifying δοθήσεται is perhaps most clearly understood in analogy to v. 41, which v. 43 parallels. Clearly in v. 41, the additional description concerning proper fruit production uses a relative clause to describe the other tenants, ἄλλοις γεωργοῖς. Thus, in verse 43, one should not understand an adverbial idea in this participial phrase, but a corresponding adjectival modifier.

ἔθναι,⁸⁷ the generic lexical sense (discussed below), and the continuous aspect of the participle’s action (ποιοῦντι) reflect the indefiniteness of ἔθναι. Unlike the direct address of “you,” there is no particular referent in the immediate context to correspond with ἔθναι. The word is defined positively only in reference to bearing fruit, and, negatively, in contrast to Jesus’ addressees. In this sentence, ἔθναι stands in contrast to ὑμῶν, “you,” from whom the kingdom of God is removed. Just as in the parable’s conclusion, in which the wicked tenants will have the vineyard taken from them and it will be given to other tenants who will produce the harvest at the right time (21:41), so too now the kingdom of God will be given to another ἔθναι who produce the kingdom’s fruit (cf. αὐτῆς, referring to kingdom). Thus ἔθναι, regardless of whatever else it may be seen to mean in the subsequent discussion, must be understood in contrast to the old tenants, the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees (“you”), and in analogy to the new, fruitful, and responsible tenants of the parable.

3.4.2 The Lexical Meaning of *Ethnos*

Particularly in the LXX and the NT, ἔθνος has two meanings,⁸⁸ (1) “a body of persons united by common kinship, culture, and common traditions”;⁸⁹ or (2) commonly in the plural, “people groups foreign to a specific people group”.⁹⁰ In Greek usage beyond the LXX and NT, in addition to attesting these two meanings, ἔθνος has a variety of

⁸⁷ The lack of the article itself does not necessarily imply indefiniteness (e.g., Wallace 1996, 243–245; BDF, 131–145; Siebenthal 2011, 188–190), but its lack with this concrete noun reflects the noun’s indefiniteness.

⁸⁸ Here I cite the definitions given in BDAG, s.v., ἔθνος, οὗς, τό.

⁸⁹ E.g., Gen 10:5; 12:2; Luke 7:5; Acts 8:9; 10:22; 17:26; referring to Israel, Ps 33:12; 2 Sam 7:23; Acts 26:4.

⁹⁰ E.g., non-Jews, Lev 20:23–26; Deut 7:1; Ps 2:1; Luke 12:30; Rom 1:14; Gal 2:15; non-Christians, in 1 Cor 12:2. Greeks also spoke of τὰ ἔθνη as the “other” peoples, meaning non-Greeks, e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 1324b. For this basic, two-fold division I depend on the analysis of BDAG, s.v., ἔθνος, οὗς, τό; LN, s.v., ἔθνος, οὗς; LEH, s.v., ἔθνος, -οὗς; Schmidt 1964b; Walter 1990; Olmstead 2011, 127–131; Schnabel 2011, 384–385; Duling 2005, 129–130.

particular uses that refer to smaller groups or do not involve ethnicity in the sense of the above, for example, a small group such as an army (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 3.32; 7.115), a particular tribe (e.g., Plato, *Leges* 776d), a guild (e.g., *PPetr.* 3, 67), or a flock of birds (Hom. *Il.* 2.84, 459). There are also several usages that do not relate to groups of people, e.g., male or female gender, or an abstract part or member.⁹¹

In Matthew, ἔθνος occurs in the singular only in 24:7, in which it refers to future conflict between a general “people” and another “people” (ἔθνος, meaning 1 above), a “kingdom” and another “kingdom” (βασιλεία). Elsewhere, ἔθνος is plural, and refers to the Gentiles specifically (meaning 2 above), often in a negative sense (6:32; 10:5; 20:25, cf. the positive sense in 12:18, 21; οἱ ἔθνικοί as Gentiles, negatively, 5:47; 6:7), enemies of Jesus and his disciples (10:18; 20:19; 24:9, meaning 2 above), or peoples in general (meaning 1 above), including Jews and non-Jews (perhaps 4:15; 20:25; 24:14; 25:32; 28:19).⁹²

An initial question to consider in light of this survey is whether ἔθνος lexically contributes a reference to the Gentiles, given the plural use of the word to do just that elsewhere, particularly in Matthew’s gospel. A key observation for this question is that ἔθνη is singular, not plural as when it refers to non-Jews.⁹³ However, alongside others, Donald Hagner considers that the singular form “inevitably alludes to the eventual mission to the Gentiles, the ἔθνη [sic]”⁹⁴ citing its occurrences in 12:21; 24:14; and

⁹¹ See further in LSJ, s.v. ἔθνος, εὐς, τό, and the extensive classification in *DGE*, s.v. ἔθνος, εὐς, τό.

⁹² Cf. discussion in Duling 2005, 130; Saldarini 1994, 78–81; Olmstead 2011, 130–131.

⁹³ This is commonly noted as evidence against an exclusively Gentile meaning, as in e.g., Davies and Allison 1997, 3:189–191; Turner 2008, 518; Snodgrass 1983, 92.

⁹⁴ The plural form of the neuter, third declension noun ἔθνος is τὰ ἔθνη, cf. Smyth 1986, 64–65.

28:19.⁹⁵ Restricting the scope of this question to a strictly lexical sense in this particular verse within its context in 21:33–46, one should not press the use elsewhere into the lexical meaning of ἔθνος here, which remains too general to refer to non-Jews specifically. The implied, default ethnic composition of ἔθνος in these historical circumstances (Jesus speaking to a Jewish audience in the temple in Jerusalem) would likely be that the ἔθνος is composed of Jews. Reading this verse in light of Matthew’s gospel as a whole, however, other evidence concerning Gentile responses of faith in Jesus and an eventual mission to the Gentiles does contribute the implied meaning that this group is composed of both Jews and Gentiles (e.g., 8:11–12; 15:21–28; 22:1–14; 28:18–20).⁹⁶

Anthony Saldarini argues on the basis of this term’s usage elsewhere in Greek writing that it is “far from certain” that this term in v. 43 refers to a new people replacing the old people, Israel.⁹⁷ Because others of the same view follow his arguments closely, I focus on his work as representative.⁹⁸ One can see that this issue entails not simply the lexical meaning of the word ἔθνος, but its implications for the identity of “you” with which Jesus contrasts the ἔθνος. Saldarini and others want to avoid an interpretation that another “people” replaces the whole people of Israel. Saldarini’s argument to avoid this is to assign a non-ethnic meaning to ἔθνος in this passage (thus eliminating an ethnic comparison of Jews and a new ethnic group). It is important first to focus on the strictly

⁹⁵ Hagner 1995, 623; e.g., Osborne 2010, 789; Schnackenburg 2002, 212.

⁹⁶ Gundry 1994, 430; Schnackenburg 2002, 212; Osborne 2010, 790–791; Turner 2008, 518–519; Sabourin 1982, 772; France 2007, 816–817; Hagner 1995, 623; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:184; Yarbrough 2011, 119; Olmstead 2011, 121–124; Smith 2009, 222.

⁹⁷ Saldarini 1994, 60. Saldarini also rightly disputes the translation “nation” as too closely connoting a modern nation-state, thus I translate this term basically as “people”; so too, e.g., Olmstead 2011, 127.

⁹⁸ Saldarini is followed by, e.g., Kloppenborg 2006, 194; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 277; Overman 1996, 303; Sim 1998, 148; Duling 2005, 139–140.

lexical meaning of ἔθνος in v. 43 (see section 3.4.4 for more detailed discussion of the contrast between ἔθνος and “you” in v. 43).

Saldarini has ruled out the interpretation that ἔθνος is contrasted as an ethnic group with the ethnic group Israel, for the parable and v. 43 are directed to the leadership, as this study has argued throughout. Saldarini points to the use of ἔθνος to refer to various groups of people united by common class, occupation, guild association, etc., as well documented in the entry of the word in LSJ.⁹⁹ On the basis of this lexical possibility, and his understanding that v. 43 should be interpreted as directly addressed only to the limited group of religious authorities, Saldarini argues that ἔθνος does not refer to “a coherent ethnic group,” but rather “the ordinary meaning...a voluntary organization or small social group” functioning as leaders for Israel.¹⁰⁰ The reason that ἔθνος cannot refer to those who follow Jesus generally as a “coherent ethnic group,” Saldarini argues, is that Christians were a diverse group of mixed ethnicities in the end of first-century when Matthew was writing. However, it seems that this argument has two problems.

First, by arguing that ἔθνος cannot refer to those who follow Jesus in general because of the incoherent ethnicities of Christians in Matthew’s day, Saldarini seems to assume that if ἔθνος describes those who follow Jesus, it must have an ethnic meaning, as a coherent race or nation. But it seems that ἔθνος can describe people who follow Jesus generally despite differences of race and community structure, based on the non-ethnic meaning of ἔθνος in Greek literature (in keeping with Saldarini’s more general, non-ethnically specific interpretation of this word’s meaning).¹⁰¹ Moreover, the indefinite characteristics of ἔθνος seem to argue against the particular leadership sub-group

⁹⁹ Cf. LSJ, s.v., ἔθνος, εὐς, τό; Saldarini 1994, 59–60.

¹⁰⁰ Saldarini 1994, 60.

¹⁰¹ Saldarini 1994, 60.

interpretation. ἔθνος here is anarthrous, and it is only defined by positive response of faith toward Jesus, ascribing a continuous, characteristic action to this group (cf. the discussion of bearing fruit below).

Second, in limiting the meaning of ἔθνος to a small sub-group, Saldarini assumes that because Jesus speaks directly to a particular set of leadership groups, the corresponding ἔθνος must lexically refer to a small sub-group as well. However, as I have argued above and will argue further below, it does not seem that the implications of Jesus statement can be limited only to his direct addressees.¹⁰² The transfer between these two groups is not simply a transfer of leadership over the vineyard, Israel, but a transfer of leadership in the kingdom of God, in which the people of God are constituted as those who follow Jesus. This reconstitution entails not just a removal of leadership for those leaders who reject Jesus, but also exclusion of all who follow their leadership in rejecting Jesus. It may be that Matthew alludes to Septuagintal usage of ἔθνος to refer to God's people, Israel, which Saldarini's small group interpretation does not seem to incorporate.¹⁰³ Finally, Saldarini's interpretation of ἔθνος seems odd if referring merely to a small group of leaders, given its usage in the singular in Matthew to refer to a general group of "people" (Saldarini's non-ethnic meaning is not disputed with this statement, but his restriction to a small group as part of the lexical sense).¹⁰⁴

Olmstead has, in response to Saldarini, surveyed the use of ἔθνος in the

¹⁰² That Jesus is *directly addressing* only the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees is not in dispute.

¹⁰³ Olmstead 2011, 127–131.

¹⁰⁴ France 2007, 816, n. 37; Foster 2004, 231–232; Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 258, n. 44.

Septuagint, confirming that it refers to people united in various ways, e.g., common geography, or ancestry, as described in the first two ethnic meanings explained above.¹⁰⁵ The Septuagint uses the word to describe groups of people in general (meaning 1, e.g., Deut 7:6–7), and very often to designate non-Jews specifically (meaning 2).¹⁰⁶ Turner and Olmstead particularly note that God’s promise to Abraham entailed making him a “great people” (ἔθνος μέγα, Gen 12:2, confirmed in later narratives of the “great people” who came from Egypt, Deut 26:5; Josh 24:4; Exod 32:10). After the exodus from Egypt, God called his people a “holy people” set apart from other peoples or nations.¹⁰⁷ Olmstead rightly argues that the basis for Matthew’s usage could stem from this Septuagintal tradition, perhaps following the designation of Israel as God’s ἔθνος; whether Matthew’s earliest readers and listeners would have made this connection is uncertain (and perhaps unlikely) given that ἔθνος is a common word used in a variety of other contexts beyond the Septuagint, which seems limited to ethnic meanings.¹⁰⁸ As noted in the discussion concerning the transfer of God’s kingdom above, other interpreters have also noted the Septuagintal influence on the choice of ἔθνος, particularly with reference to the ἔθνος of Dan 2:44 (cf. also the ἔθνος ἅγιον of 1 Pet 2:9, drawing on Exod 19:6).¹⁰⁹

However, Olmstead further argues, on the basis of the likely Septuagintal background of Matthew’s use of ἔθνος, that this word signals the future replacement of a new ethnic group in the place of the old ethnic people, Israel, represented by the leaders

¹⁰⁵ Olmstead 2011, 127–129.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., Lev 20:23–26; Deut 7:1; Isa 60:11–12; Israel as a people, e.g., Ps 147:8–9; Deut 4:34; 2 Sam 7:23. In one passage, LXX Ps 32:12, the ἔθνος, οὗ ἐστὶν κύριος ὁ θεὸς αὐτοῦ, is parallel to the λαός, ὃν ἐξελέξατο εἰς κληρονομίαν αὐτῷ. See further references and discussion in Olmstead 2011, 127–129.

¹⁰⁷ “ὁμοῖς ἐσεσθε μοι βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον,” LXX Exod 19:6.

¹⁰⁸ Olmstead 2011, 130–131; Turner 2008, 518.

¹⁰⁹ Gundry 1994, 430; Kloppenborg 2006, 192; One can also point to other extra-biblical usage of ἔθνος to refer to the people of Judea, e.g., 1 Macc 12:6; Josephus, *A.J.* 13.166.

directly addressed (citing, e.g., the collusion of people and leaders in the death of Jesus later in the gospel, 27:11–26).¹¹⁰ Olmstead argues that the use of ἔθνος in Matthew always has an ethnic sense outside of v. 43, and thus an ethnic sense should be retained in v. 43 even though the ἔθνος is not explicitly defined ethnically but “ethically” (bearing fruit).¹¹¹ By “ethnic” Olmstead means “relating to a group of people having common national or cultural tradition,” quoting from the *OED*, thus aligning with the first meaning explained above.¹¹²

This discussion calls for a brief summary. In contrast to Saldarini, who sees only a change in leadership unrelated to ethnicity (a replacement ἔθνος defined only by contrasting association and occupation, a non-ethnic lexical meaning), Olmstead sees a replacement of Jews with a new ethnic group composed of Jew and Gentile (a replacement ἔθνος defined by contrasting ethnicity). As indicated above, one can see that the interpretation of the lexical meaning of ἔθνος is integrally related to the nature of the contrast between Jesus’ direct addressees and ἔθνος in v. 43.

Olmstead is correct to point to the Septuagintal background of ἔθνος as a plausible influence on Matthew, but wrongly insists that this group must be ethnically contrasted with the Jews based on the common cause of the leaders and the people later in Matthew’s gospel. As I will argue further below, it seems to be a *non sequitur* to argue that because Jewish leaders collaborated with Jews in Jerusalem to execute Jesus, the entire Jewish people as Jews are rejected and replaced. If the new ἔθνος is to be understood here as an ethnic group composed of Jews and Gentiles in light of the rest of the gospel, then it is not clear how Israel is rejected as an ethnic group, given that some

¹¹⁰ Olmstead 2011, 131, 120.

¹¹¹ Olmstead 2011, 130–131.

¹¹² Olmstead 2011, 130, n. 38.

Jews are also part of the ἔθνος (e.g., Jesus and his twelve Jewish disciples). Moreover, it is likely that for Jesus and his historical audience, if one considered the ethnic composition of this ἔθνος, it would likely be understood to be Jewish by default, and Jesus makes no clear indication of gentile inclusion in this verse. Yet it does not seem ethnicity is in view as a characteristic of this ἔθνος, but a response of faith to Jesus. I argue further in the next section that verse 43 should not be interpreted to mean that the ἔθνος of v. 43 replaces Israel. Rather, Jesus only contrasts those who reject him with those who follow him, not ethnic Israel with another ethnic group.

Despite the criticisms of Saldarini's view above, this study argues with him that the ἔθνος of v. 43 should be understood lexically as a non-ethnic group, in this instance united by their common production of the fruit of the kingdom of God, not by their common ethnicity contrasted with that of the Jews. Saldarini is correct to argue that the particularly ethnic sense of ἔθνος does not seem to occur in v. 43, but he is incorrect to restrict this ἔθνος only to a leadership sub-group instead of a more general meaning. Jesus contrasts leaders who reject him ("you") with a group defined by their acceptance of Jesus and their leadership for others to do the same. Yet it seems that Jesus would also implicate all who follow the lead of those who reject him. If the transfer of the "kingdom of God" implies the reconstitution of God's people as those who follow Jesus, this excludes from the kingdom all who fail to follow, not just the leaders, and involves more than a change in leadership. The Septuagintal background to the singular use of the word ἔθνος, particularly in Gen 12:2 and Exod 19:6, may provide evidence that this ἔθνος refers to the people of God, though one differently constituted by those who share the defining characteristic of following Jesus the Messiah (perhaps subtly implying that this

ἔθνος is not defined any longer according to ethnicity, as with the centurion of 8:5–13 and the Canaanite woman of 15:21–28). Given these connotations, it would indeed be odd and “unnecessarily restrictive” to interpret ἔθνος as *only* a replacement leadership sub-group from Jesus’ followers.¹¹³ As J. K. Riches argues, “because of the corporate sense of *ethnos*, one cannot detach the nature of the leadership from the nature of the people they lead.”¹¹⁴ The next step in the analysis of ἔθνος is to consider how the production of fruit contributes positively to the identity of this “people.”

3.4.3 Positive Identity: Bearing the Kingdom’s Fruit

The only positive characteristic given to the ἔθνος in v. 43 is that they produce the fruit of the kingdom. The particular genitive relationship between καρποῦς and αὐτῆς is most likely a genitive of source (thus “the fruit originating from the kingdom”).

In Matthew’s gospel, bearing fruit is a common theme related to the kingdom: in his kingdom proclamation, John the Baptist urges bearing fruit worthy of repentance in response (3:8); the one who hears and understands the word of the kingdom bears fruit (καρποφορεῖ, 13:23); Jesus taught that one could know a prophet by the fruit he bears (7:16–20); the kingdom of heaven is likened to a miniscule mustard seed that grows into a large tree (13:31–32, cf. the leavening yeast in 13:33). Contrastively, failing to bear fruit has negative consequences: John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed that those who do not bear good fruit will be destroyed (3:10; 7:19; 12:33); Jesus cursed a fig tree for its lack of fruit (21:9).

¹¹³ Quote from Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 257; see similar argumentation in Luz 2005, 3:42; France 2007, n. 37; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:189–190.

¹¹⁴ Quoted from Riches 2000, 221–222, n. 84 in Duling 2005, 139.

Recalling the earlier discussion of the parable in section 3.2.1, in Isaiah 5 and in Jesus' parable, the fruit stands for righteousness and justice (MT Isa 5:7, *mišpāt* and *šēdāqāh*, LXX: κρίσις and δικαιοσύνη). The failure of the wicked tenants to be obedient to the owner resulted in lawlessness, the opposite of righteousness. Jesus similarly accuses the scribes and Pharisees of ἀνομία, though they appear righteous, in 23:28. Jesus taught that those whose righteousness did not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees would not enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20). Jesus linked the kingdom with righteousness explicitly when he taught to seek the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness first (6:33).¹¹⁵ Relevant also for this passage is the parable of the two sons immediately preceding. Jesus claimed that John the Baptist came in the "way of righteousness (ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης), but the religious leadership did not respond in faith like the tax collectors and prostitutes who enter into the kingdom ahead of them (21:28–32).¹¹⁶ Thus the old tenants are identified with lawlessness, while the new tenants, the "people," are identified with righteousness, in keeping with God's kingdom, in their obedient response to the owner.

On analogy to the parable and v. 41, the production of fruit here refers to yielding up the fruit of the vineyard to the owner when he asks it, in its proper time (21:41). This action of producing fruit recalls responding to the word of the kingdom and bearing fruit (as in the parable of the sower, 13:19, 23), and responding to righteousness with faith upon hearing John the Baptist and Jesus (21:28–32). This action stands in contrast to the wicked tenants' resistance to the owner, even to the point of murdering his son, usurping the vineyard for themselves. Thus, converting the imagery of the parable, the "people"

¹¹⁵ Noted particularly by Hagner in this discussion (Hagner 1995, 623).

¹¹⁶ Hagner plausibly argues that this refers not to John the Baptist's ethical conduct but his continuity with the saving activity of God, as in Rom 1:17 (Hagner 2008, 174).

who produce the fruit of the kingdom are those who respond in faith to God's work in Jesus by leading others of God's people to respond, producing further kingdom fruit of repentance and obedience to God's work in Jesus.¹¹⁷ This is precisely what Jesus accused the religious leadership of *not* doing, as shown, e.g. in his accusation that the scribes and Pharisees shut others out of the kingdom of heaven, for they do not enter, and they bar others from entering who are on their way in (23:13) by resisting Jesus and leading others to do the same.¹¹⁸ In sending his disciples for kingdom mission with his authority (10:1–8, 28:16–20), according to Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom and God's righteousness (5:17–20; 13:11; 16:18–20; 18:15–20), Jesus inaugurates precisely the type of service indicated in 21:43.¹¹⁹

In bearing fruit, the members of the ἔθνος not only respond in faith to the kingdom individually, but also lead others of God's people to do the same. This follows from the interpretation that in receiving the kingdom of God, the ἔθνος receives leadership roles in God's reign over God's people constituted by those who follow the Messiah. In light of the analogy with the parable, John Nolland's claim that the ἔθνος only bears their own individual fruit is insufficient, for it seems to ignore the tenancy of the ἔθνος over the people of God implied in v. 43.¹²⁰ Other interpreters consider that bearing the fruit of the kingdom means taking up the privileges and role of the people of

¹¹⁷ This conclusion concurs generally with and draws from the interpretations of Talbert 2010, 252; Carter 2000, 429; Hannan 2006, 181; Gundry 1994, 430; Overman 1996, 303–304; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 273; Saldarini 1994, 61–63; Turner 2008, 518; Keener 1999, 515.

¹¹⁸ Oppong-Kumi 2013, 273.

¹¹⁹ Saldarini 1994, 63; Oppong-Kumi 2013, 273; Gundry 1994, 430; Carter 2000, 429; Turner 2002, 59–60; Konradt 2014, 185–192.

¹²⁰ Nolland 2005, 879, n. 122.

God generally.¹²¹ This understanding is natural if one understands the reception of the kingdom of God as simply inclusion in the people of God, and if one considers that this ἔθνος is in opposition to the people of Israel as a whole. Yet, this is not the *primary* sense of bearing fruit, though it certainly assumes fulfilling the role of the people of God centered on the Messiah. Thus this study agrees with these interpreters against those who would restrict the sense of v. 43 to refer *only* to a transfer in leadership. However, if one understands bearing fruit as *only* responding personally to the kingdom proclamation in Jesus, one misses the specific meaning intended in Jesus' statement against the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees after the parable, and thus the contrastive identity of the ἔθνος.¹²²

Lastly, the laconic nature of this description of ἔθνος in terms of bearing fruit has important paraenetic implications. By this characterization Jesus challenges the assumption, even among his own followers, that one has a claim to the kingdom of God apart from bearing the kingdom's fruit, i.e., responding in authentic faith to God's work in Jesus (as John the Baptist challenged the Pharisees and Sadducees in 3:7–10; as Jesus taught, those who respond in faith and thus do the will of God will enter the kingdom, while those who simply call him "Lord" will not, 7:21).¹²³

With the preceding discussion I have already stepped into the next section, in which I examine what more can be said about this ἔθνος by virtue of its contrastive identity with the chief priests, elders of the people, and Pharisees.

¹²¹ Hagner 1995, 623; France 2007, 816; Sabourin 1982, 772; Schnackenburg 2002, 212; Foster 2004, 234; Hare 1993, 249; Snodgrass 1983, 93; Luomanen 1999, 167; Evans in Carlston and Evans 2014, 418.

¹²² In this (mis)understanding, one interprets this verse as though it were spoken to a general audience (in conjunction with the parable of the sower, for instance).

¹²³ This paraenetic theme is widely recognized, e.g., in France 2007, 817; Hagner 1995, 623; Luz 2005, 3:43; Hannan 2006, 182; Snodgrass 1983, 93; Konradt 2014, 184.

3.4.4 Contrastive Identity: The Opposition with “You”

Along with the interpretation of “kingdom of God,” its transfer, and the lexical meaning of ἔθνος, the interpretation of the relationship between “you” and “people” in v. 43 is contested and important. In this section I analyze what this contrasting relationship can contribute to the meaning of ἔθνος. The interpretation of “you” has implications for ἔθνος, and vice-versa, given that they are contrasted.

This study began with the understanding that 21:43 should be interpreted as spoken particularly to Jesus’ direct addressees, the religious leadership who challenged him in the temple precinct. However, the issue has arisen occasionally whether Jesus’ statement in 21:43 implicates others beyond those Jesus directly addresses. The argument presented in this study is that v. 43 entails a reconstitution of the people of God around Jesus, thus excluding all who similarly reject Jesus as do Jesus’ direct addressees. In the above discussion, I have argued that the following evidence supports this interpretation: (a) if original, the destructive stone of 21:44 pronounces a universal judgment against anyone who rejects the stone/son, Jesus;¹²⁴ (b) the transfer of the vineyard of the parable is reconceived in terms of the transfer kingdom of God, making it clear that not only the leaders but all people who reject Jesus will be excluded from the kingdom and thus from inclusion among God’s people;¹²⁵ (c) the use of the term ἔθνος, if Matthew is here influenced by the Septuagint use, recalls other passages in which ἔθνος designates the people of God (Gen 12:2; Ex 19:6), indicating further that Israel is now constituted by those who follow Jesus;¹²⁶ (d) the function of bearing fruit involves leading others to

¹²⁴ See above, end of section 3.2.2.

¹²⁵ See above, last paragraph of section 3.3.2.

¹²⁶ See above, section 3.4.2.

respond in faith to God's kingdom work in Jesus, thus entailing the reconstitution of God's people around Jesus.¹²⁷ On the basis of this data, Jesus' words addressed directly to the religious leadership entail also the judgment of all those who similarly reject Jesus, and the inclusion into the ἔθνος of those who follow him.

A key issue concerning the identity of "you" in contrast to ἔθνος is whether "you" should be understood to implicate the people of Israel generally, given that the statement does seem to implicate others who similarly reject Jesus.¹²⁸ If the ἔθνος represents the people of God constituted by those who follow Jesus, this may seem a natural interpretation, contrasting the old people of God (Israel) with the new people of God. This is a common interpretation that carries forward the notion that Jesus' words implicate others beyond his addressees. If "you" can be interpreted to refer beyond Jesus' direct addressees to all Israel, then the ἔθνος cannot be Israel in the same sense. However, Jesus did not proclaim the future exclusion of the people of Israel from God's kingdom in v. 43, and thus ἔθνος refers to not to a different people, but Israel itself, defined by God's work in Jesus. After having argued for this position, I then discuss what further characteristics may be drawn for the ἔθνος of v. 43 in light of the transfer of leadership in God's kingdom from Jesus' addressees, the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees particularly. These two issues provide the structure for this section.

To understand the contrast in v. 43, and thus the nature of ἔθνος, one must decide whether or not Jesus implies that the kingdom of God will be taken not only from the leaders (and from all who similarly reject Jesus), but from the whole people of Israel. The

¹²⁷ See above, section 3.4.3.

¹²⁸ That is, some interpreters understand that though Jesus directly addresses the leadership, all Israel is implicated in his statement of judgment in verse 43.

previous discussion has already ruled out that ἔθνος refers to the Gentiles, and thus appeal to this word as signaling a replacement of Israel with the Gentiles is incorrect. Some interpreters argue that the chief priests, elders of the people, and Pharisees represent the entire nation of Israel, and thus the entire nation suffers removal of the kingdom.¹²⁹ This is seen, e.g., in the collusion of the leaders and crowds in Jesus' death (27:20–25). Instead, I argue that Jesus only implicated those who would reject him, primarily leaders, but also those who follow their leadership. Jesus contrasts two groups with “you” and ἔθνος, one defined by their rejection of Jesus, one defined by their acceptance of him. Two arguments support this reading.

First, it is a *non sequitur* to argue that the exclusion of those who reject Jesus entails the exclusion of every member of the people of Israel. The people's later complicity and collaboration with the chief priests and elders in Jesus' death (27:20–25), and Jesus' condemnation of “this generation” (23:36–39) only provide evidence that many among the people similarly rejected Jesus along with their leaders.¹³⁰ This data cannot show that Jesus or Matthew communicates a complete rejection of Israel, i.e., the Jews, without exception. For decisive evidence, one may point out that Jesus claimed his mission was to Israel (10:6; 15:24), and that some Jews responded positively to Jesus (e.g., Simon, Andrew, James, and John, his disciples, 4:18–22). The position I am arguing against may appear to be a straw man, but given the lack of qualification in

¹²⁹ E.g., Stanton 1992, 154; Osborne 2010, 790–791, though with qualifications; Luz 2005, 3:42; Sabourin 1982, 772; France 2007, 816–817; Schnackenburg 2002, 212; Foster 2004, 231–234; Evans in Carlston and Evans 2014, 418; Hare 1993, 248–249; Luomanen 1999, 167.

¹³⁰ Contra Luz 2005, 3:42; Olmstead 2011, 119–121; Foster 2004, 233.

several commentators' explanations regarding a rejection of Israel in v. 43, this counter-argument is relevant.¹³¹

Second, it creates theological incoherence to interpret that Jesus here rejects the Jewish people, Israel without qualification, for Jesus was himself a Jew; his disciples were Jews; if he rejected Israel *in toto*, he would thus be “sawing off the branch he is sitting on,” i.e., the important genealogical link he personally has with the people of Israel. That this is important for Matthew is clear from Jesus' genealogy (1:1–17). Jesus also claims salvation-historical continuity with the God of Israel, the God of Isaiah (the God of his parable of the tenants). Jesus claims to speak for God himself against some who are rejecting God's new work in Jesus for the salvation of God's people (Matt 1:21–24; 10:8; 15:24; 23:37), and thus cannot be understood to proclaim God's rejection of Israel as a whole. Rather, God's mission in Jesus was to restore his people, Israel, not to replace his people with a different people. Therefore, Jesus speaks not of a rejection but

¹³¹ Speaking for myself, of course, there is potential room for confusion (but ultimate clarity) even among the explanations of those who consider that Jesus did not reject Israel. Grant Osborne, for example, explains that v. 43 describes “the salvation-historical move from the Jewish people to the Gentiles/church,” but then explains rightly on the same page that “the Gentiles do not replace Israel but join Israel as the people of God” (Osborne 2010, 791; similarly, France 2007, 816–817). Craig Evans speaks of v. 21:43 as implying “the rejection of unbelieving Israel,” though in a footnote he later seems to clarify that this refers to the exclusion of “unfaithful tenants” of “*both* dispensations” (Evans in Carlston and Evans 2014, 418, n. 106). In contrast, some speak of the rejection of Israel without apparent qualification. Graham Stanton argues that v. 21:43 makes the same point as 23:37–38, “Judaism as a whole is rejected” (Stanton 1992, 154). Paul Foster considers it likely that here Matthew saw “Christian communities as the replacement for Israel as well as being the authentic inheritors of the Kingdom” (Foster 2004, 234). Douglas Hare first correctly identifies “you” as “not only...the opponents mentioned in the context but...all who follow their leadership in rejecting John and Jesus,” yet then expands this to mean that “Israel is now to be ‘decommissioned’; its elect status as ‘light to the Gentiles’ is to be taken over by the church” on the basis of his understanding that the kingdom of God refers to divine election (Hare 1993, 248–249). Petri Luomanen speaks of “the removal of the kingdom from Israel to Matthew's Christian ‘nation’” with this verse (Luomanen 1999, 167). Leopold Sabourin considers that with 21:43, “Matthew has epitomized his understanding of Jesus' judgment on the historical Israel...the Jewish nation loses her privileges as first-born, as chosen people...Israel becomes like any other nation” (Sabourin 1982, 772). Schnackenburg remarks, “Israel is not denied the Reign of God for its time; but now...that Reign is taken from it...” (Schnackenburg 2002, 212).

of a restorative constitution of the people of God around Jesus.¹³² In keeping with this conclusion, several interpreters relate Jesus' claims in v. 43 to Jewish remnant theology, describing the ἔθνος as the true Israel (thus not replacing Israel but reconstituting Israel),¹³³ though it must be stressed that in light of God's kingdom work in Jesus, the conception of Israel is radically altered (e.g. with the open inclusion of all people and universal atonement in Jesus' death).¹³⁴

One may gain further insight into the meaning of ἔθνος by virtue of the particular contrast with the chief priests, elders of the people, and Pharisees in v. 43. In addition to the other evidences already mentioned, the change in leadership itself seems to implicate others beyond Jesus' addressees and implies a redefinition of the people of God. In what follows, I present a further argument against those who restrict the meaning of v. 43 to Jesus' addressees alone based on the implications of replacing the chief priests, elders of the people, scribes, and Pharisees. This discussion will then allow me to draw further observations regarding the meaning of ἔθνος.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Jesus spoke of a "simple" change in leadership from chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees to another Christian-Jewish leadership group (ἔθνος, as Matthew Sim argues).¹³⁵ Once the transfer is realized, what are the implications? As noted in chapter 2 above, the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees

¹³² Thus drawing on the interpretations of Turner 2008, 516–519; Osborne 2010, 790–791; France 2007, 816–817; Hagner 1995, 623; Olmstead 2011, 131, who argues for a reconstitution of the people of God in Matthew, though he does so (seeming to contradict himself, in my view) alongside his contention for the rejection of Israel in Matthew.

¹³³ Keener 1999, 515, n. 171, comparing Jesus' claims to those of the Qumran sects; Osborne 2010, 32; Turner 2008, 518–519; Menninger 1994, 135–157; cf. the excellent survey of various aspects of Second-Temple Jewish remnant theologies in Elliott 2000, 309–354, 433–514, 575–637, 642–652; cf. the resistance to seeing ἔθνος as replacing Israel, but wrongly considering that the people of Israel are not affected or involved in some way in Overman 1996, 304; Sim 1998, 149; Saldarini 1994, 60; Levine 1988, 210–211; Hannan 2006, 181.

¹³⁴ As in, e.g., Konradt 2014, 345–353.

¹³⁵ Sim 1998, 149; cf. also Overman 1996, 302–305; Levine 1988, 210–211.

were not simply dispensable employees hired by God (e.g., in the case of the priesthood, membership was determined by lineage). Jesus claims that the leadership of each of these diverse groups is fundamentally at odds with God's desires because of their shared rejection of God's work in Jesus, and will be replaced by the leadership of a people who will respond obediently as leaders over God's people. Jesus does not simply describe a future replacement of these leaders according to the same specifications (new chief priests, new elders, new scribes, new members of the Pharisees, all with the same roles as before, perhaps on analogy to the appointment of a new high priest by the Romans). It seems implied that those who will function as the replacement leaders for God's people will not share some of the uniquely legitimating characteristics of these elite groups, such as priestly ancestry, elite socio-economic status, and pre-eminent interpretive authority over the same traditions of scriptural interpretation (which Jesus opposed), if these groups are to be destroyed completely.

However, one could object that Jesus' words, strictly considered, only condemn his addressees insofar as they reject Jesus, and that their condemnation does not explicitly involve also the destruction and replacement of their particular and diverse roles as religious authorities as such. If this were the case, however, the parable would have called for reform within the wicked tenants, not complete destruction and replacement by different tenants (21:41, 44). If one were to eliminate the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees who opposed Jesus and replace them with others, this would entail a dramatic change in Jewish leadership given their centrality to Jewish religion, despite the fact that not every Jewish leadership group is represented among Jesus' direct addresses (e.g., the vast majority of priests who were not leading priests). Moreover, if the people of God as

constituted by those who follow Jesus will include Gentiles, as indicated considering the gospel as a whole beyond 21:33–46, their involvement in this ἔθνος changes the nature of religious leadership over God’s people (though this is not mentioned in this verse).

Thus the identity of this ἔθνος as “not chief priests, not elders of the people, not scribes, not Pharisees” seems to entail a reconception of Jewish religious leadership. In their place are those who respond to the message of the kingdom of God (and thus enter it, and are involved in leadership with this new “people” described in v. 43), namely, tax collectors and prostitutes (!), as Jesus claimed in the preceding parable (21:28–32). Verse 43 is a cataclysmic declaration akin to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple,¹³⁶ providing adequate reason for his addressees’ potentially violent response in light of these two parables (21:45–46, cf. pl. παραβολάς, 21:45).

The transfer described cannot occur without a radical change, implicating not simply the leaders’ roles but the religious life of every Jew, demanding a response to God’s work in Jesus.¹³⁷ Even if one restricted the transfer of v. 43 to involve *only* a change in leadership, the implications of this in light of the historical circumstances of Jesus’ words necessarily involve a redefinition of such leadership, based on a redefinition of the people of God in and through Jesus.¹³⁸ Though, surely, one should interpret v. 43 as

¹³⁶ Jer 22:1–12; cf. the crowd’s consideration of Jesus as a prophet in response to these statements, 21:46; Jesus’ statement against the Temple in 24:1–2; Jesus’ claim that “something greater than the Temple is here,” in 12:6; France 2007, 810.

¹³⁷ Thus the claim of Davies and Allison that “nothing at all is implied about the eschatological fate of Israel” seems incorrect (Davies and Allison 1997, 3:190).

¹³⁸ One might respond in defense that the views of Saldarini, Overman, and Sim are not affected by this argument, given that they consider 21:43 to be a redactional addition by Matthew to justify his own community’s authority over against that of early-rabbinic Judaism after Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70. Thus this statement of Jesus need not be interpreted in this specific way, reading in the particular historical nature of the change in leadership. Aside from disputing that v. 43 is a pure creation of Matthew, I would argue that if Matthew wished to claim that his group has the authority of Jesus for the primacy of their

directed primarily to the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees, on the basis of this argument and those above, one cannot restrict this statement to involve only those whom Jesus addresses directly, despite the laconic nature of the text.¹³⁹

It is difficult to see what more is reflected concerning the nature of the ἔθνος in contrast to the chief priests, elders of the people, and Pharisees. An exact, positive equivalency for each is not intended, given the vague and laconic nature of Jesus' statement ("not chief priests, not elders of the people, not Pharisees" is the extent of the text's contrastive characterization of ἔθνος). As has been said, the key difference between "you" and ἔθνος is the response to Jesus as leaders of God's people; this difference is most prominent in the verse. Nevertheless, further general observations may be made by contrastive analogy. Some of the particular characteristics that give legitimacy to these groups' diverse functions seem to no longer apply in precisely the same way if they are to be replaced *in toto* by another people. These characteristics seem to be relativized by the newly decisive characteristic for leadership over God's people, i.e. following Jesus. Because the ἔθνος is defined over against the chief priests, it seems that priestly ancestry is not a factor for exclusion from this group's ministry. Because the ἔθνος is defined over against aristocratic leadership in Jerusalem, elite social and economic standing are no longer limiting factors for the legitimacy of this group's leadership. Because the ἔθνος is defined over against scribes and Pharisees, it seems that religious leadership will be possible without adherence to their scriptural expertise, and

leadership in the Jewish community, this seems a particularly odd place to do so. Placing words in the mouth of Jesus (and inserting the Pharisees as an addressee to refer to contemporary Jews) *here* seems a clumsy editorial decision if one wanted to retain the general message that Jesus and his followers (and Matthew's community) had not broken with Judaism in general or represented a radical sect.

¹³⁹ Contra Saldarini 1994, 59–63; Levine 1988, 210–211; Overman 1996, 302–305; Sim 1998, 149; Kloppenborg 2006, 194; Davies and Allison 1997, 3:184, 189–191; Nolland 2005, 878–879; Keener 1999, 515; Turner 2008, 516–517; Gundry 1994, 430; Talbert 2010, 252; Carter 2000, 429; Konradt 2014, 185.

may be open to those who don't have their elite, "scribal-literacy." Because the Temple is central to the leadership of the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees, and a new group cannot simply replace the priesthood in particular without a claim to priestly ancestry and expertise, the contrast with these groups may imply that the leadership of the ἔθνος will be centered upon something else. If the ἔθνος is to truly take over leadership for God's people, they must be able to act as interpretive authorities and teachers concerning Torah and other scriptures for God's people in a different way, compatible with God's work in Jesus. The ἔθνος must be able to provide authoritative guidance and make judgments in matters of dispute among God's people. They must be able to guide God's people in proper worship in light of God's work in Jesus. However, the text identifies no more than that this ἔθνος will not be the same as the current temple leadership who reject Jesus, yet the ἔθνος will lead God's people in bearing fruit.¹⁴⁰ The judgment of whether these observations are meaningful or represent over-interpretation of a laconic text perhaps rests upon whether one finds similar evidence elsewhere in Matthew.

3.4.5 Summary

In light of the preceding two chapters, the following summary conclusions may be drawn concerning the function and identity of ἔθνος in Matt 21:43. The function of this ἔθνος is to lead God's people in bearing kingdom fruit, i.e., to lead others in responding in faith to God's work in Jesus the Messiah. This function replaces the previous leadership of the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees who rejected and opposed Jesus, leading others to do the same. By this contrast, the leadership function of the ἔθνος implicitly entails an ability to act as the other authorities did in a new way, interpreting scripture,

¹⁴⁰ Thus Snodgrass' conclusion that "There is nothing in our parable that relates directly to statements about the temple" seems incorrect (Snodgrass 1983, 73).

adjudicating disputes, and leading others in worshipping and obeying God. The identity of the ἔθνος consists of those who follow Jesus, God's people centered on the Messiah. God will give them their positions of leadership, and thus their place among God's people. On the basis of their function as a replacement of chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees, the social makeup of this ἔθνος does not seem to be tied necessarily to priestly ancestry, elite socio-economic status, or scriptural expertise of the same kind as the previous leaders. Those who are members of the ἔθνος are defined by their leadership function; there is therefore no explicit separation between leader and led within the ἔθνος in this verse. In this particular pericope strictly considered, the ethnic constitution of this ἔθνος is ambiguous because it is not in view, but could be understood at least to default as consisting of Jews, as there does not seem to be a clear reference to the inclusion of Gentiles.¹⁴¹

3.5 The *Ethnos* of Matt 21:43 in Matthew's Ecclesiology

In this final section, I consider how the characteristics of the ἔθνος of 21:43 compare with select passages in Matthew's gospel that also speak of the function and identity of Jesus' followers, and then consider the place of this ἔθνος in Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' followers as a whole (Matthew's "ecclesiology"). Of course, Matthew has no formal, systematic ecclesiology; yet, one can discern aspects of his theological conception of Jesus' followers in the gospel narrative.¹⁴² First, I compare the leadership function of ἔθνος with the function of Jesus' followers as authorized to bind and loose, and authorized for kingdom mission. Second, I compare the identity of ἔθνος with the

¹⁴¹ Though with other passages in Matthew one can see a mixture of Jews and Gentiles as the community of those who follow Jesus in faith.

¹⁴² Harrison 2012, 9; Bornkamm in Bornkamm, Barth, and Held 1963, 38–39.

social and ethnic composition of Jesus' followers elsewhere in Matthew. Third, I make some concluding observations concerning the relationship of the ἔθνος of v. 43 to Matthew's portrayal of Jesus and his disciples as a whole.

3.5.1 The Function of *Ethnos* in Matthew's Ecclesiology

Jesus gives to Peter and to his disciples generally the authority to “bind” and “loose” (16:13–20; 18:15–20). After Peter's identification of Jesus as Messiah, Jesus promises that he will give to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, closely linked with his authority to bind and loose (16:19). The keys (τὰς κλεῖδας) of the kingdom given to Peter likely refer to authority and capacity to control entry for others, based on Peter's confession of Christ as Messiah, entailing an authoritative understanding of scripture and Jesus' teaching (here representative of other disciples as well).¹⁴³ This authority over access to the kingdom for others contrasts with the scribes and Pharisees who block the entry of those who are on their way in (23:13). Peter is prominent due to his function as a model disciple¹⁴⁴ in his confession; he understands the identity of Jesus, becoming the representative foundation or “rock” of Jesus' followers who will similarly understand and proclaim the message of the kingdom.

Both Peter and the disciples in general receive the authority to bind and loose. Jesus describes this authority to the disciples as exercising community discipline, confronting sin and forgiving sin (18:15–22). The likely meaning of “binding” and “loosing” is the authoritative activity of interpreting and applying scripture in light of

¹⁴³ Cf. Isa 22:22; Rev 3:7; a link of keys and teaching occurs in Luke 11:52; Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 315–316; Maier 1984, 58; Konradt 2014, 186–190, 337; Overman 1996, 241–242; Hare 1993, 191. The possession of the keys is not simply about decisions concerning doctrine (as in Bornkamm in Bornkamm, Barth, and Held 1963, 45), but about giving others access to the kingdom by proclaiming the kingdom message, and thus closing access for those who reject this message.

¹⁴⁴ Though not a perfect one, cf. 16:21–24, immediately following.

Jesus' teaching to various situations in life (both in confrontation, permission, and forgiveness).¹⁴⁵ Because of the close connection between possessing the keys of the kingdom and binding and loosing in Matt 16:19, the fact that the disciples also bind and loose suggests that Peter does not singularly possess the "keys of the kingdom" (the authority and capacity to control entry to the kingdom for others), but the authority is also embodied among the disciples generally.¹⁴⁶ So too, possessing the keys of the kingdom and binding/loosing should not be too strictly distinguished, though the former connotes primarily mission proclamation (access into the kingdom), and the latter discipleship.¹⁴⁷

The commissions given by Jesus for the disciples are also important for understanding the function of Jesus' disciples in Matthew's gospel. In Matt 10:1–8, Jesus commissions his twelve disciples for kingdom mission to the people of Israel in light of his observations that the people were in need, maltreated like sheep without a shepherd (9:36–38).¹⁴⁸ Thus the twelve disciples function as caregiving shepherds for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6) as they preach the coming kingdom of heaven, heal diseases,

¹⁴⁵ Cf. the political and judicial binding and loosing of the Pharisees, Josephus, *B.J.* 1.111; see discussions for various options in Davies and Allison 1991, 2:634–641; for the view offered here, cf. Konradt 2014, 186–189; Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 308; Harrison 2012, 12; Overman 1996, 243–245, 270; Hare 1993, 215; Gundry 1994, 368–369. The proposal of Gundry that the keys of 16:19 signify scribal activity seems lacking in evidence (Gundry 1994, 334–334); Hiers' proposal that binding and loosing refers to authority in exorcism does not seem to fit the contexts, for binding demons would make some intuitive sense given similar language in 10:8, but loosing them would not (Hiers 1985, 233–250; cf. Davies and Allison 1991, 2:631).

¹⁴⁶ Carlston offers the understanding of Peter as a prototype for the disciples, citing his first position to act among Jesus' disciples (Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 323).

¹⁴⁷ Davies and Allison 1991, 2:635. Davies and Allison remark, p. 635, "...to have the keys is to have the power to bind and loose," but then argue based on the prominence of Peter, "If the power to bind and loose was also given to others, that does not entail that those others exercised their power in quite the same way as did Peter, or that they too held the keys of the kingdom." It seems difficult to maintain that the function of holding the keys is significantly distinct from binding and loosing, though I agree that Peter's prominence should be maintained.

¹⁴⁸ Thus functioning as shepherds by the authority of Jesus as shepherd, in contrast to the people's current leaders, Konradt 2014, 74–76; this passage also recalls similar OT themes (Jer 23:1–6; Ezek 34:1–10) and David as a future shepherd of Israel (Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23), Hare 1993, 109.

raise the dead, and cast out demons (10:7–8).¹⁴⁹ Likewise, in 28:18–20, on the basis of Jesus’ cosmic authority as the resurrected Messiah, the eleven disciples are sent to proclaim the kingdom message, to make disciples of Jesus, to confirm new disciples’ faith with baptismal immersion, and to teach on Jesus’ behalf so that others would obey his words (whose teaching fulfilled and transcended the Law, 5:17–20).¹⁵⁰ The language of this passage seems modeled on a similar scene in Daniel 7:13–14, 22, 27, in which one like a son of man receives everlasting, universal dominion over against competing kingdoms, and the saints of God reign over an ultimate, everlasting kingdom.¹⁵¹ The disciples’ mission is accompanied by Jesus’ own divine presence at all times and places (cf. Emmanuel as a name of Jesus 1:23).

In kingdom mission and the exercise of community discipline, Jesus’ followers function only by authority from God and with the empowering presence of God in the community, both given through Jesus. They function as divinely ordained religious authorities concerning the interpretation of scripture and exercise of community discipline according to Jesus’ teaching.¹⁵² They speak for God and Jesus as they invite others into the kingdom of God, whether Jew or Gentile, teaching and shaping disciples of the kingdom to obey God’s will in obeying Jesus’ teaching. Thus the future leadership function of the ἔθνος in 21:43 seems highly consonant with the functions of Jesus’ disciples in these passages. The implied functions of the ἔθνος in 21:43 concerning

¹⁴⁹ Several commentators view the 12 as representing Jesus’ followers as God’s reconstituted people, Israel; cf. e.g., Overman 1996, 142–143; Hare 1993, 111.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. discussion in Deines 2008a; Levine 1988, 180; Hagner 2008, 173.

¹⁵¹ Cf., e.g., Overman 1996, 409; Hare 1993, 333.

¹⁵² Jesus also promises the twelve disciples that they will rule with him over the twelve tribes of Israel when the son of Man sits on the throne in the eschatological renewal of the cosmos (19:28). This likely refers to the eschatological age in the ultimate future, but serves as an end point of the trajectory began by Jesus’ granting authority in mission given to the twelve disciples to care for Israel (10:1–8; 28:18–20; cf. discussion in Davies and Allison 1997, 3:55–56; Konradt 2014, 259–263; Hare 1993, 229; Gundry 1994, 392–394).

authoritatively interpreting scripture, offering judgments for God's people, and leading others in obeying God by following Jesus are particularly fulfilled in the commission at the end of the gospel, 28:18–20. As with the transfer of the kingdom of God examined earlier, it is all the more clear that Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis of the disciples' leadership functions. The disciples even freely offer forgiveness from God apart from Temple sacrifices,¹⁵³ in contrastive analogy to the priesthood, only and directly through the atoning death of Jesus.

3.5.2 The Identity of *Ethnos* in Matthew's Ecclesiology

The leadership functions of Jesus' disciples surveyed above raise the question of whether all disciples share these functions, or only a leadership group among the disciples (e.g., the twelve).¹⁵⁴ Matt 21:43 does not refer to the internal structure of the ἔθνος, only the leadership function of the group itself in God's kingdom over God's people. On one hand, Jesus directly addressed his missionary commissions only the twelve (or eleven) disciples (10:1–8; 28:16–20). Similarly, Jesus granted the authority to bind and loose and the keys of the kingdom to Peter alone. Jesus gave the promise of future rule with him over Israel to Peter and "his disciples" (19:23), implying twelve disciples corresponding to twelve eschatological thrones (though Judas later betrays Jesus). On the other hand, Jesus also granted the authority to bind and loose to the community of disciples generally (18:15–20), making no explicit mention of the twelve.¹⁵⁵ The leadership function of the ἔθνος in 21:43 also serves to ascribe a kingdom authority to all who follow Jesus without distinction. It seems clear that elsewhere Jesus defines leadership in the community as

¹⁵³ I.e., both in community discipline, 18:15–22, and as part of their kingdom proclamation that Jesus' death and resurrection offers divine forgiveness, cf. 1:21; 9:2, 6; 26:28; Acts 2:37–39.

¹⁵⁴ As argued, e.g., by Turner 2008, 516.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. discussion in Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 307.

humble service, thus indicating both that strict hierarchy and lack of leadership do not seem to characterize Jesus' disciples (e.g., 18:1–5; 23:8–11).¹⁵⁶ There were many other disciples of Jesus beyond the twelve (e.g., “many women,” in 27:55; Joseph of Arimathea, 27:57). It seems far too restrictive to interpret that the missionary commissions of 10:1–8; and 28:16–20, while directly addressed to the twelve/eleven disciples, did not also apply to other disciples, even if there were differences in particular roles in this mission based on varying circumstances and personal resources, etc.¹⁵⁷ Yet Matthew does seem to distinguish the twelve disciples as uniquely representative, describing them as “apostles” as he lists them (10:2–4; cf. the special positions of the twelve in the eschaton, 19:28; the prototypical position of Peter, 16:17–19). As noted above, Matthew does not present a treatise on community structures in his gospel. What seems clear is that in Matthew, Jesus' disciples collectively and individually participate together as a divinely ordained authority for defining and fostering obedient living before God (18:15–20), and for kingdom mission (21:43; 28:16–20), while represented and led by (ultimately) the eleven disciples.¹⁵⁸

Robert Gundry speaks concerning v. 43 of “Matthew's democratizing the custodianship of the kingdom,” fitting emphases on the lowly and humble in the gospel (e.g., 18:1–14).¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Amy-Jill Levine explains that ἐκκλησία “symbolizes the church constructed on an egalitarian framework,” dividing “repentant marginals” from

¹⁵⁶ Cf. discussion in Carlston in Carlston and Evans 2014, 306–307.

¹⁵⁷ One could argue that if the twelve disciples were to teach others to obey all that Jesus commanded, surely the very commands to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach others are included in these commandments to be taught and *obeyed*. Konradt observes that the missionary activity commissioned in 10:1–8 and 28:16–20 is essentially the same as that of Jesus, and thus argues for this activity as descriptive of any disciple of Jesus (“the life of a disciple is for Matthew essentially a missionary life,” Konradt 2014, 77). See also Hare 1993, 335.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., Overman 1996, 243;

¹⁵⁹ Gundry 1994, 430.

“unfaithful leaders.”¹⁶⁰ Yet the text only indicates that every member of the ἔθνος will function as a good tenant, responding in faith to God’s work in Jesus and leading others to do the same. Ultimately, a general description and lack of reference to hierarchy in the ἔθνος of v. 43 are not evidence that the community of Jesus’ disciples was egalitarian or democratic or wholly marginal (though one could argue that they were mostly non-elite as presented in the gospel of Matthew, cf. further below).

On the basis of the universal mission of Jesus’ disciples to Jews and Gentiles,¹⁶¹ it seems clear that Jesus’ disciples include both Jew and Gentile. The deciding factor for inclusion among God’s people is following Jesus in faith, and some Gentiles have this faith and follow Jesus, as already indicated in e.g., 8:5–13; 15:21–28. Thus the ambiguity of the ethnic composition of ἔθνος in 21:43 is clarified in light of the gospel as a whole, particularly the commission of 28:18–20. The subtle hint in 21:43 seems confirmed that gentile ethnicity is no longer relevant for inclusion among God’s people. The inclusion of Gentiles signals the fulfillment of scriptural promises to bless the world through God’s people, Israel, now constituted by those who follow Jesus. As Matthias Konradt summarizes, “the evangelist’s central concern is to consistently locate Jesus’ ministry within God’s history with his people Israel, on the one hand, and to link this history with Jesus’ universal soteriological significance, on the other.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Levine 1988, 211.

¹⁶¹ Some dispute that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is inclusive of the Jews, e.g. Hare and Harrington 1975, 359–369, to which Meier and others respond by arguing for an inclusive view (Meier 1977). Levine argues that it refers to Gentiles here, but should be seen as an expansion of the earlier mission to Israel, not as contrast (Levine 1988, 190–192). For those who see a mission to both Jews and Gentiles, cf. Overman 1996, 404–409; Levine 1988, 165–192; Hare’s later commentary (Hare 1993, 334); Olmstead 2011, 131; Gundry 1994, 595. In either case, the mission is ultimately to both Jews and Gentiles, as Matthew does not depict the rejection of all Israel, as argued above. Konradt plausibly argues that the duration of the mission to Israel does not come to an end, based on the clear reference in Jesus’ commission to enduring resistance and persecution in mission to Israel until the eschaton in 10:22–23, Konradt 2014, e.g., 324.

¹⁶² Konradt 2014, 353.

The social make-up of the ἔθνος in 21:43 is largely undetermined in its context. Jesus simply defines the ἔθνος as those who respond to him with faith. However, by contrast to Jesus' addressees whom they will replace as leaders, the ἔθνος at least does not seem to be tied necessarily to priestly ancestry, elite socio-economic status, or scriptural expertise of the same kind as the previous leaders, though anyone with these qualities could follow Jesus and thus become a member of the ἔθνος. Elsewhere in Matthew, the individuals who respond in faith to Jesus (aside from the crowds who follow him) include, e.g.: sages (2:1, 10–12), an itinerant preacher (John the Baptist, 3:1–6), many women from Galilee (including Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, 27:55–56; 28:1–10), professional fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, John, 4:18–22), tax collectors (Matthew, 9:9; other tax collectors, 9:10; 21:31), a scribe (8:19), prostitutes (21:31), a centurion (8:5–13), a leper (8:1–4; 26:6), a paralyzed man and his friends (9:2–3), a leader of a synagogue (9:18), a woman with a persistent hemorrhage (9:20–22), blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–33), and a Canaanite woman (15:21–28). Because those who respond in faith to Jesus are included among the ἔθνος in 21:43, in light of this survey it seems confirmed that the future function of Jesus' disciples as indicated by 21:43 does not require them to have, e.g., priestly ancestry (or Jewish ancestry), a certain level of education and scriptural expertise, a particular socio-economic status, a particular profession, or male gender. Rather, Jesus' disciples function as they do only because God has granted them to do so, not because of any previous qualifications or legitimizing characteristics of their own. Instead of being exceptionally wise and understanding, they are the infants to whom God

has revealed his kingdom (11:25–27), those to whom it has been granted to understand the kingdom (13:11–17).

3.5.3 The Place of the *Ethnos* of Matt 21:43 in Matthew's Ecclesiology

In light of the above discussion, one can conclude that the identity and function of the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 seems to fit very coherently with other portrayals of the identity and function of Jesus' disciples in Matthew. One may also suggest what seem to be among the particular contributions of the identity and function of this ἔθνος in light of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' disciples as a whole.

First, the meaning of ἔθνος in v. 43 makes a christological contribution, as the particular function of the ἔθνος is founded only on the work of God in Jesus the Messiah. The only means for this diverse group to function as v. 43 describes is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' atoning death and the authority bestowed after his resurrection seem to be the particular means by which Jesus establishes a new religious leadership over God's people, e.g., his disciples offer forgiveness, and function as interpretive authorities of scripture apart from the Jewish authorities centered on the temple.

Second, v. 43 offers additional evidence that the authority and responsibility for kingdom mission and discipleship is integral to following Jesus and given to all, not simply a select group. This is true irrespective of various ethnic or class distinctions.

Third, v. 43 perhaps provides the culmination of the contrast between Jesus and his disciples, on the one hand, and the religious leadership who oppose him, on the other. In other passages, Jesus' disciples are granted authority and responsibilities which would imply that the current religious leadership is at least irrelevant. In some passages, Jesus

directly condemns various groups of the religious establishment (e.g., the scribes and Pharisees in ch. 23). Yet in the parable of the wicked tenants and v. 43 particularly, the contrast explicitly identifies a wholesale replacement of the religious leadership who oppose Jesus with Jesus' followers.

Chapter 4

Summary and Concluding Reflections

This study began in chapter 1 with an overview of interpretations of Matt 21:43, noting interpretive differences in identifying “you,” ἔθνος, the kingdom of god, and the nature of its transfer (1.1). I then set out my hermeneutical presuppositions, including theological, philosophical, and historical bases of the study (1.2.1). Finally, I gave an overview of relevant characteristics of the Gospel of Matthew as a text (1.2.2).

In chapter 2, I offered historical arguments and relevant background for my interpretive approach to Matt 21:43, reading the verse primarily as words of the historical Jesus in the temple precinct to groups of religious leaders. This discussion included arguments for the identity of Jesus’ direct addressees (2.1), an overview of their historical characteristics (2.2), arguments for the historicity of the narrative frame of the parable of the wicked tenants (2.3), and arguments for the authenticity of the parable of the wicked tenants (2.4), including Matt 21:43 particularly.

In chapter 3, I proceeded with the exegetical analysis of the identity and function of ἔθνος on the basis of the historical framework of chapter 2. After deciding to include the textually uncertain v. 44 (3.1), I examined the connections of v. 43 to its surrounding contexts in the parable of the wicked tenants (3.2), finding that v. 43 followed from the religious leadership’s double rejection of God and his climactic messenger, Jesus. I then examined the meaning of the transfer of the kingdom of God in v. 43 (3.3), finding that it signaled a transfer of leadership over God’s people as constituted by those who follow Jesus, that its timing was in the future, and that its means was likely the death and resurrection of Jesus (3.3.3). Next, I examined the identity and function of ἔθνος (3.4),

finding that the lexical meaning of ἔθνος refers to a non-ethnic group defined only by a response of faith to Jesus (3.4.2), that the characteristic of bearing fruit indicated the function of leading others to respond in faith to God's work in Jesus (3.4.3), that the contrast with "you" should be understood not as a mere change in leadership, nor as a replacement of Israel, but as a replacement of those who similarly reject Jesus as did the religious leadership whom Jesus directly addressed (3.4.4), and that the leadership replacement by the ἔθνος likely entailed a reconception of Jewish religious leadership over God's people (3.4.4). Finally, I compared the function and identity of this ἔθνος with other passages describing the identity and function of Jesus' disciples in Matthew (3.5.1–2), finding much coherence, and noting particularly the unique culmination in 21:43 of the contrast between Jesus' disciples and the groups of religious leadership who oppose Jesus (3.5.3). Though by no means original, this study has taken up a less commonly examined issue by focusing very closely on the historical character of the contrast Jesus drew between ἔθνος and his direct addressees in order to understand the identity and function of the ἔθνος.

One possible area for further study follows from the argument for the authenticity of the parable and its judgment/replacement pronouncement. I have argued that Jesus' words entail a change in religious leadership by virtue of the removal and replacement of the chief priests, scribes, elders, and Pharisees whom Jesus addressed directly. If this argument is sound, this parable and its judgment pronouncement may provide further historical evidence in favor of Jesus' formation of the ἐκκλησία as attested in Matthew. Further, it may be fruitful to compare Jesus' conception and formation of this community with similar groups at Qumran, though time and space did not allow for this in this study.

Second, this study could also prove fruitful for further investigations into the Christology of Matthew. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the basis for the rejection and replacement of a radically different leadership group over against those whose leadership centers substantially upon the temple. If Jesus functions as the locus of the presence of God, the ultimate atonement for God's people, a prophet against the temple and its religious leadership, as well as one who raises up a new kind of religious leadership, this would suggest that a temple Christology could be fruitfully pursued in Matthew.

As I began this study, I indicated my interest in how this text should be appropriated as scripture by the 21st century Christian church. This study has argued that this text does not speak of a replacement of all Jews as God's people by the church, but of a replacement of the leadership over God's people now constituted by followers of Jesus the Messiah. This text should not be considered anti-Jewish, as it does not condemn Jews as such, but those who reject Jesus. Interpretations that do consider this verse to signal a replacement of Israel by the church may yet appeal against the charge of anti-Judaism as well, for historically considered, this verse is part of an inner-Jewish debate, and is no less polemical than other Jewish texts of the period. That this text could be used to support a mistaken, unambiguously anti-Jewish reading and anti-Jewish behavior is undeniable, as any scriptural passage could be misappropriated. Yet in light of this study, this would be reading decidedly against the intended, historical meaning of the text.

Rather, based on this study, Christians who consider the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 as a scriptural model for what it means to be a follower of Jesus today find the following characteristics: (1) followers of Jesus are, fundamentally, those who have responded in

faith to God's work in Jesus on their behalf; (2) followers of Jesus have been granted a place in God's kingdom by God's grace alone; (3) the essential function of a follower of Jesus in God's kingdom is to participate in God's kingdom mission to lead others to God as a faithful tenant; (4) this function entails proclaiming the message of the kingdom and participating as an active, contributing member in corporate practices of discipleship; (5) this function is integral to all followers of Jesus no matter the particular personal circumstances or resources; (6) this function is a gift from God, on the basis God's grace in Jesus alone, for the purposes of God's kingdom alone; (7) this function is important and urgent in light of the need for all people to know the message of the kingdom, and the need for all Christians to be continually formed as disciples.

Appendix 1

Abstract

This thesis examines the identity and function of ἔθνος in Matthew 21:43 in relation to the historical Jesus and the Gospel of Matthew's depiction of Jesus and his followers.

The study begins with an overview of interpretation concerning Matt 21:43 and relevant methodological presuppositions for the study (chapter 1). Second, this study examines the particular historical context of Matthew 21:43 as words of Jesus in the temple precinct (chapter 2). Third, this study utilizes this historical context to exegetically analyze the identity and function of ἔθνος in Matthew 21:43 and its literary contexts.

The exegetical thesis of this study is that ἔθνος refers to Jesus' followers, who function as religious leaders in God's kingdom among God's people constituted anew by those who follow Jesus, replacing the errant religious leadership whom Jesus directly addressed. This study argues that the identity and function of ἔθνος fit concordantly with the theological portrayal of Jesus' disciples elsewhere in Matthew. The identity and function of ἔθνος in Matt 21:43 contribute further evidence in the gospel that all of Jesus' disciples function in God's kingdom mission to lead others to respond in faith to God's work in Jesus. Matthew 21:43 represents the contrastive climax in Matthew's gospel between the religious leadership who opposed Jesus and his disciples who respond in faith.

Appendix 2

Vita

The author of this work is Justin Reid Allison. Justin was born May 13, 1988 in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he has been raised and attended primary and secondary school. After attending the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas, from which he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classics and Philosophy, Justin was a pastor at Christ Church of Central Arkansas in North Little Rock, and taught at his alma mater, Arkansas Baptist High School. Since the fall of 2011, Justin has attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, pursuing a Master of Divinity and Master of Theology in New Testament, completing his studies in June of 2015. Justin and his wife Andrea have returned home to Arkansas before moving to England in the fall for further doctoral studies in New Testament.

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